THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE IMAGERY OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL, BIBLICAL AND HUMAN-FIGURE POEMS IN RILKE'S NEUE GEDICHTE

by

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE IMAGERY OF THE MYTHOLOGICAL, BIBLICAL AND HUMAN-FIGURE POEMS IN RILKE'S NEUE GEDICHTE submitted by Robert Foot in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

This study undertakes an examination of those poems in Rilke's Neue Gedichte which have human or human-like figures (eg. mythological gods) as their subjects, in an attempt to crystallize and define the nature and function of the imagery they contain. In conjunction with this analysis it will be shown that although these figures belong to three widely different historical epochs, namely, the world of classical antiquity, the Old and New Testament eras, and more or less contemporary times, they all express varying aspects of the fundamental theme of the individual and his relationship with the forces of the external world around him.

The poems are of two types: some are the depiction of certain epic mythological and biblical events, normally in which one person figures prominently, whilst others concentrate solely on single figures. It is not Rilke's purpose in these poems to vividly reproduce in poetic form historical scenes, nor to present well-rounded individualized character studies, but rather to expose that which for him constitutes the inner states of mind of the characters concerned. In every poem therefore, Rilke strives to express in as palpably visible and as comprehensible a form as possible the elusive inner meanings and psychological states of his subjects, and projects these outwards. In this process of 'Veräusserlichung des Innerlichen' no visible external images of the human subjects are depicted; they disappear into the background, as it were, for the poet is only intent

on conveying in as concrete a form as possible the existential 'Befindlichkeiten' which they experience and represent. A detailed analysis of the imagery of the human-figure poems will attempt to demonstrate how this effect is achieved.

The study begins with a detailed exposition of the underlying theoretical ideas of the Neue Gedichte and demonstrates their affinities with Rodin's conception of plastic sculpture. This examination is important for an understanding of the types of poem Rilke was creating in the work and for the way in which they should be critically approached. In ensuing chapters the poems taken for consideration and the images they contain will be analysed and interpreted in detail under the headings of mythological, biblical and human-figure poems, in order to ascertain if they are related in theme and poetic technique. The final chapter then attempts to synthesize all the hitherto determined results in order to crystallize the nature and function of the imagery.

Nirgends, Geliebte, wird Welt sein, als innen. Unser
Leben geht hin mit Verwandlung. Und immer geringer
schwindet das Außen. Wo einmal ein dauerndes Haus war,
schlägt sich erdachtes Gebild vor, quer, zu Erdenklichem
völlig gehörig, als ständ es noch ganz im Gehirne.
Weite Speicher der Kraft schafft sich der Zeitgeist, gestaltlos
wie der spannende Drang, den er aus allem gewinnt.
Tempel kennt er nicht mehr. Diese, des Herzens, Verschwendung
sparen wir heimlicher ein. Ja, wo noch eins übersteht,
ein einst gebetetes Ding, ein gedientes, geknietes -,
hält es sich, so wie es ist, schon ins Unsichtbare hin.
Viele gewahrens nicht mehr, doch ohne den Vorteil,
daß sie's nun *innerlich* baun, mit Pfeilern und Statuen, größer!

(Seventh Duino Elegy)

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INTRODUCTION

In comparison to the vast amount of literature that has appeared concerning Rilke's later poetry the studies which deal solely with the Neue Gedichte are relatively few in number. The work, its lyrical effects and its meaning, is for the most part discussed within the larger context of Rilke's entire poetic production. There are also numerous articles which mostly present single interpretations of individual poems.

The main areas of discussion centre around the subjectivity or objectivity of the poems and whether or not they should be regarded as being metaphorical and symbolical, or simply abstract descriptions with no deeper significance. Related to this are the many interpretations of Rilke's concept of the 'Ding.'

Bernhard Blume regards the poems of the Neue Gedichte as being entirely subjective, that is, he suggests that Rilke uses them as a vehicle to express personal messages in ostensibly objective form. In this way, the figures contained in the poems become symbols: "Die 'Dinge' der Neuen Gedichte sind nicht Gegenstände, sondern Gleichnisse."[1] Karl-Heinz Fingerhut in his analysis of the animal poems of the work arrives at the conclusion that the animals are 'vor allem Bespiegelung und Verklärung des menschlichen Innern,' and as such are, 'Chiffern, Projektionen des dichterischen Innern auf ein geeignetes Objekt der Außenwelt. Wieder ist für den Dichter der menschlichen Problematik das Tier eine Grenzfigur, in der bildhaft das eigene menschliche Sein in einer Kunstwelt objektiviert wird.'[2]

The symbolic nature of the poems is also stressed, amongst others, by Hermann Pongs, who speaks of Rilke's 'Dinggedichte' as being characterised by a 'Zusammenfall von Metapher und Symbol,'[3] and Hans-Rudolf Müller.[4] Brigitte Bradley, on the other hand, sees affinities between Rilke's 'things' and T.S. Eliot's objective correlative - 'Dieses (das Ding) unterscheidet sich vom Symbol, da es auch der Imagination des Dichters entspringen kann und nicht an etwas Vorhandenes geknüpft zu sein braucht; es ist nicht auf Einzelheiten beschränkt, sondern kann sich auf Bildkomplexe, Situationen usf. erstrecken.'[5]

Various attempts have been made to demonstrate that the Neue Gedichte form a cyclical unity, and that the order in which they are presented in the work corresponds to an inner development of certain basic themes. The most notable of these are made by Brigitte Bradley[6] and Hans Berendt,[7] who try to prove, with varying degrees of unsuccessfulness, that the poems are all closely related internally in theme and content.[8]

In conjunction with determining the basis for a symbolical interpretation of the Neue Gedichte several works have appeared which deal with the form and structure of the poems. H.W. Belmore gives an exceptional stylistic analysis of all of Rilke's poetic works, examining in detail such features as rhyme, rhythm, syntax, language, metaphor and simile, etc.[9] L. McGlashan comes to the conclusion that the poems consist of systems of 'word tensions' and that a symbolic interpretation is not justified. He makes the convincing argument that the poems exist in and for themselves and that each should be regarded separately. He makes the important statement that the images of the poems lose their traditional function as a device to increase the richness of multifarious associations within the context of the poems, but that they all concentrate on one particular aspect of the subject and underline the position from which the reader is to view it.[10] This conception has been adopted and expanded in this study where the nature of the imagery is discussed.

By far the most comprehensive work dealing with the structure and meaning of the poems of the Neue Gedichte is Wolfgang Müller's Rainer Maria Rilkes "Neue Gedichte." Vielfältigkeit eines Gedichttypus,[11] in which the relationship between 'Ding' and 'Ich,' the structural characteristics of the work and certain underlying themes are discussed in detail. His discussion of simile and metaphor is particularly useful and he reaches conclusions similar to those of McGlashan with the idea that metaphor and simile are important for perspective from which the subject of the poem is to be viewed.

Works which deal specifically with Rilke's imagery are few in number and generally interpret recurring images as motifs. Of these August Stahl's "Vokabeln der Not" und

"Früchte der Tröstung"[12] is the most comprehensive. The author is concerned with bringing to light through an examination of imagery in all of Rilke's works the central motifs which underlie his poetry. He discovers certain recurring images such as 'die Bilder der Trennung' and 'das Bild des Randes' and also 'Bilder der Einheit,' and concludes that Rilke is 'ein Dichter der menschlichen Not.'[13] References to the Neue Gedichte, however, are sparse.

Considering the richness and variety of the imagery of the Neue Gedichte, it is surprising to find that there has not yet appeared any work which devotes itself to a detailed analysis of its nature and function. Most of the single interpretations of the poems concentrate on the inanimate subjects, on flowers and on animals, and then only in an attempt to offer interpretations and to extract symbolical meanings. In this way, critics have interpreted the term 'Dinggedicht' quite literally, inferring that the most genuine examples of this type of poem can only centre around 'things,' that is, non-human subjects. As a result, a detailed analysis of the human and human-like subjects of the Neue Gedichte is lacking, and so this study hopes to make a contribution to this area by analysing the imagery of this group of poems as a whole, thereby ascertaining if they are fundamentally connected thematically and if the imagery itself shares common characteristics of technique.

Each poem in this work is, according to Rilke's conception of the 'Ding,' a 'sichtbares Äquivalent' of a 'thing,' that is, it is a 'Kunstding,' which is the artist's refashioning of the essence of a phenomenon from the external world into a firmly contoured work of art. It follows from this, therefore, that the 'Kunstding,' the poem, is itself an image, for in its capacity as a visible equivalent it reflects, it forms an image of a 'thing.' The poems that will be interpreted in this study will therefore be treated as images in their own right under the subject headings of mythological, Biblical and human figure imagery. In turn, the nature and function of the multiplicity of images of which these poems are formed will be examined.

Rilke developed in the Neue Gedichte a new way of seeing 'things' so that their essential meaning could be exposed - all subjective emotion had to be suppressed on the part of the poet so that in the work of art, these 'things' could be observed without the danger of distortion from foreign influences. Paul Böckmann sums up the effects that this strict objectivity, caused by the absence of the lyrical 'Ich,' has on the imagery: 'Das lyrische Bild mußte eine neue Bestimmtheit und Intensität gewinnen, ohne in das Metaphernspiel zurückzufallen. Jenseits der Subjektivierung oder Mystifizierung der dem Menschen zugehörigen Gegenstandswelt mußte deren Bildgestalt so sagbar werden, daß sie das dem Menschen gesetzte Maß zu erkennen gab. Damit erst wird die Aufgabe deutlich, vor der sich Rilke als Dichter gewachsen zeigen mußte, wenn er seinen Versen Gewicht und Bedeutung geben wollte.'[14] Exactitude, intensity and forceful expressiveness

were therefore to be the inherent characteristics of the imagery of these poems if they were to fulfil their purpose of revealing the essence of the things of the empirical world. An examination of the technique Rilke uses for his imagery in the Neue Gedichte will attempt to demonstrate how this is achieved, and will also endeavour to determine what sensory effects these images produce.

The investigation will begin with an exposition of the theoretical concepts of the Neue Gedichte: this will include a survey of Rodin's importance for the development of Rilke's theories of plastic poetry, and also an analysis of two 'Dinggedichte' which demonstrate the practical application of these, and offer an insight as to how such poems should be critically approached. The following three sections then interpret the mythological, Biblical and human figure poems and the images they contain in order to determine their thematic similarities and to examine the nature, the function and technique of the imagery. The final section offers an overview of all the groups of poems studied and attempts to ascertain if they are fundamentally thematically connected and if the imagery they contain serves the same basic function.

CHAPTER I: THE THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF THE NEUE GEDICHTE

In his Neue Gedichte Rilke has presented us with a mosaic of images: images from the world of Classical Antiquity, from the Bible, the Middle Ages, images of human figures from contemporary times, of animals, flowers and of a wide range of inanimate objects. Rilke used these to reveal the many-sidedness, the deeper significance of the world to an era which had lost sight of the purpose of its existence.

In the course of many centuries man had lost respect for the world around him; life had become hollow and aimless, for everywhere he looked with superficial gaze he saw only confusion. Rilke saw the predicament of modern man as being one of sublime bewilderment and fear of the unknown. In an age of industrialisation and technology this situation had reached a point of crisis, where the underlying moral values which form the fundament of any civilisation were subordinated to the dictates of purely material goals. Religion and philosophy, those institutions which are the bearers of the ethical code of a civilisation and which continually strive to discover the truth of existence had crumbled, leaving modern man staring into the abyss of ignorance which he himself had created and was the deep rooted cause of his insecurity.

Rilke was of the firm belief, however, that there existed in Nature, against which man was now confronted in bewilderment, a fundamental natural unity which could be discovered if each individual 'thing' of the empirical world were scrutinously examined for its inherent truth. This was Rilke's mission as an artist - to discover the 'große vorhandene Wirklichkeit'[1] which underlies the external reality of the everyday world, thereby pointing the way to self-assurance through self-knowledge.

Rilke's essential task was, therefore, to examine individual aspects of life in order to uncover their deeper significance. He shows that each object, or 'thing,' in the visible world has a spiritual value; that it has an existence of its own, and that each contains something of the very essence of existence, of 'Sein.'

To understand how Rilke uses images in the Neue Gedichte it will be necessary to examine the concept of the type of poem in which they are found. When we have this clear in our mind we will be in a position to determine whether or not the poetic theory which lies behind the collection can actually be seen in practice; whether or not Rilke has succeeded in conveying to all those who care to look, the elusive, but ever present deep-rooted reality which lies beneath the surface of all things.

Rilke came to write the Neue Gedichte after a fairly long gestation period of trying to formulate the concept of the 'Ding,' that is, of each individual object and its cosmic and temporal relationship. It was the 'things' of life that Rilke wanted to explore and reveal in the Neue Gedichte. This work can only really be fully understood if the theoretical ideas which lie behind it are brought to the surface.

This may, in many ways, be considered to be the main weakness of it as a work of art. This fact will become more clear when we come to examine in more detail some of the individual poems.

Rilke wrote a good deal in letters and critical essays about his progress as an artist and his theories on the nature of poetry. These will be used to elucidate his notions on plastic poetry and his concept of the Dinggedicht, even if there is the risk of repeating what has already appeared in the voluminous amount of Rilke interpretation which has accumulated in the last forty years.

The essence of Rilke's poetic purpose in the central stage of his development as a poet may be summed up in a fairly lengthy extract from the requiem to a young poet, "Für Wolf Graf von Kalkreuth," written in Paris in 1908.

> ...O alter Fluch der Dichter,
> die sich beklagen, wo sie sagen sollten,
> die immer urteiln über ihr Gefühl
> statt es zu bilden; die noch immer meinen,
> was traurig ist in ihnen oder froh,
> das wüssten sie und dürftens im Gedicht
> bedauern oder rühmen. Wie die Kranken
> gebrauchen sie die Sprache voller Wehleid,
> um zu beschreiben, wo es ihnen wehtut,
> statt hart sich in die Worte zu verwandeln,
> wie sich der Steinmetz einer Kathedrale
> verbissen umsetzt in des Steines Gleichmut.
> Dies war die Rettung. Hättest du nur ein Mal
> gesehn, wie Schicksal in die Verse eingeht
> und nicht zurückkommt, wie es drinnen Bild wird
> und nichts als Bild, nicht anders als ein Ahnherr,
> der dir im Rahmen, wenn du manchmal aufsiehst,
> zu gleichen scheint und wieder nicht zu gleichen -:
> du hättest ausgeharrt.[2]

Here Rilke condemns the use of poetry solely as a vessel for the poet's own subjective emotions. Poetry should not be the direct expression of the outpourings of a tormented soul; the poet should not use art to mirror a personal predicament in order to achieve a type of catharsis. This is decadent, sickly and weak, and achieves no purpose. The poet must attempt to mould his emotions with infinite precision, and with as much distance as will allow him to be as objective as possible. He should not sit in judgement over them; he should not reveal passion. He should 'build' a poem, as the stonemason builds a cathedral. As the stonemason constructs an edifice with stone, so should the poet construct a poem with words. Stone is impartial, it cannot speak. The mason builds the cathedral stone by stone - the finished product, however, does speak; it becomes a monument; it has the capacity to arouse emotion through its grandeur, its sheer massiveness and intricacy. But that is not all - it contains 'Schicksal,' 'destiny.' It contains a part of the person who constructed it - that can never be eradicated - but it also contains something much greater, more universal than the one who created it. The mason constructs a work with his own hands; it becomes personal to him. But when he has completed his task, that which remains behind belongs exclusively to him no longer. It stands in its own right, and is independent of its creator and the world of things around it. In this way it has the ability to express the elemental; it has the ability to express a deeper truth; it emits a basic 'Befindlichkeit' of 'Dasein,' i.e., an elemental subconscious experience of existence.

In the same way, a poet should construct a poem using words as his raw material. His own passion should be strictly omitted; he should build his emotion sincerely, but objectively, with words, for words are as impartial as stone. On observing the finished product, the poet will see much more than a mere reflexion of himself - he will see an image of 'Schicksal,' destiny, truth, which is absolute, which cannot be altered, as it is moulded firmly in an edifice of words. The poet's personality has disappeared - its presence is elusive, and has become transfigured in such a way so as to become unrecognisable. In its stead, an image of destiny, or truth radiates constantly. It is this image of destiny which gives art its true purpose - it becomes something much more than the transient depiction of fleeting subjective emotion. It is the knowledge that he has created something for eternity that allows the poet to create in a hostile world.

Rilke's early poetry was rooted in traditions which were already outworn - Romanticism, Naturalism, 'Neuromantik' which was prevalent in Germany at the turn of the century, and also to a certain extent Impressionism. The poems are filled with images of loneliness, and yearning. It is subjective mood poetry, which is filled only with the fleeting emotions of its creator. Rilke's development as a poet up until his central period may be seen in many respects to be a series of attempts to overcome this, and to make his art more objective, more a statement of truth, rather than the mere reflexion of transient experience.

The greatest influence which caused Rilke's poetic development to turn to greater objectivity was the French sculptor, Auguste Rodin. Rilke admired the way in which Rodin used the 'things' of the world and transformed and moulded them into works of art. Rilke consciously attempted to apply Rodin's conception of plastic art to poetry.

In his lecture on Rodin written in 1902, Rilke begins to formulate a new concept of the poet, using the French sculptor as a model. Rodin saw the world as being full of 'things;' each 'thing' has an existence of its own, and has the capacity to radiate its essence to the observer who has developed the art of intense seeing. Each thing is solitary; the artist is also in a state of isolation - he goes through life overwhelmed with wonder and admiration at the world of things, silently communing with them. He attempts to examine each thing through the uncorrupted eyes of a child, minutely and with precision. Nothing is too small for the attention of the artist, for everything has an existence waiting to be uncovered, and in the smallest, the greatest can be revealed.

The impulse which led to a reconstruction of the things of life into things of art, was fear: speaking of Rodin's numerous works displayed in the Louvre, Rilke writes:

> Und wer diese Gebilde sah, der empfand, dass sie nicht aus einer Laune geboren waren, nicht aus einem spielerischen Versuch, neue, unerhörte Formen zu finden. Die Not hatte sie geschaffen. Aus der Angst vor den unsichtbaren Gerichten eines schweren Glaubens hatte man sich zu diesem Sichtbaren gerettet, vor dem Ungewissen flüchtete man zu dieser Verwirklichung.[3]

Art, therefore, has the power to give the unknown concrete form: by understanding each separate entity in life, and by accepting it for what it is, the anxiety and bewilderment of human existence would be removed. Rodin gave concrete shape to the fears, passions and longings of modern man in his sculpture in the form of animals, human figures, and parts of the body: by making the unknown visible, clearly recognisable, its threat to man was lessened.

By contemplating every surface and contour of an object, and reproducing them as he saw them, Rodin gave each individual part of that object a meaning of its own. A finished work would consist of numerous of these surfaces, so that the object became vibrantly alive, and was able to radiate emotive sensations to the sensitive observer. This, according to Rilke, was that which was so important in Rodin's plastic art: objects were taken, hands, human figures, etc., but were not impressionistically reproduced. Every surface and contour had to be carefully examined, and had to have a meaning for the whole. All the sensual and spiritual associations in the object are explored by the artist, which he then transmutes into his work. The observer must then rediscover these associations for himself. It is as if the work of art, the 'Kunstding' were communing personally to him.

In the Rodin lecture of 1902, Rilke stresses the loneliness, the independence of the 'thing' - it lives in a 'Kreis der Einsamkeit'[4] - it has an existence and a meaning of its own.

> Was die Dinge auszeichnet, dieses Ganz-mit-sich-Beschäftigtsein, das war es, was einer Plastik ihre Ruhe gab; sie durfte nichts von aussen verlangen oder erwarten, sich auf nichts beziehen, was draussen lag, nichts sehen, was nicht in ihr war. Ihre Umgebung musste in ihr liegen.[5]

Unlike human beings, the 'things' of life have no material goals to which they strive: they exist purely for the sake of existing, and remain unaffected by external influences. The 'Kunstding' is essentially the essence of a 'Ding' made visible. It is divorced from space and time. Its sole function is to evoke meaning: this it does from within itself and needs no external environment to aid interpretation. This concept can be made more clear, when one reads Rilke's elucidation in the lecture of Rodin's figure "Der Verlorene Sohn."

> So ist jener schmale Jüngling, der kniet und seine Arme empor wirft und zurück in einer Geste der Anrufung ohne Grenzen. Rodin hat diese Figur "Der verlorene Sohn" genannt, aber sie hat, man weiss nicht woher auf einmal den Namen "Prière." Und sie wächst auch über diesen hinaus. Das ist nicht ein Sohn, der vor dem Vater kniet. Diese Gebärde macht einen Gott notwendig, und in dem, der sie tut, sind alle, die ihn brauchen. Diesem Stein gehören alle Weiten; er ist allein auf der Welt.[6]

This work, therefore, is devoid of any temporal or spatial context. It stands alone in its own right, and has the capacity to communicate a meaning to the perceptive observer. Its theme does not belong to any one religion, but to them all.

Rodin created, asserts Rilke, by attempting to experience the essence of the figure which was to be transformed into a 'Kunst-Ding.' He uses Rodin's bust of Balzac to illustrate this. The sculptor had attempted to crystallize the very being of the great French writer in a work of art, and also had gone even further than this by attempting to imbue the work with all the possibilities which Balzac could have achieved. Rodin had occupied himself with the writer for many years; he had visited his homeland, read his letters, examined meticulously the characters of his works, and had uncovered his personal idiosyncracies. Rodin had tried to be Balzac, and when finally this experience had reached its greatest intensity, he created, with the aid of living human models, a work of art - something which contained the very essence of its subject.

> Das war Balzac in der Fruchtbarkeit seines Überflusses, der Gründer von Generationen, der Verschwender von Schicksalen. Das war der Mann, dessen Augen keiner Dinge bedurften; wäre die Welt leer gewesen: seine Blicke hätten sie eingerichtet. Das war der, der durch sagenhafte Silberminen reich werden wollte und glücklich durch eine Fremde. Das war das Schaffen selbst, das sich der Form Balzac's (sic) bediente, um zu erscheinen; des Schaffens Überhebung, Hochmut, Taumel und Trunkenheit....So hatte Rodin in einem Augenblick ungeheuerer Zusammenfassung und tragischer Übertreibung seinen Balzac gesehen, und so machte er ihn. Die Vision verging nicht; sie verwandelte sich.[7]

For Rodin, therefore, Balzac became the very embodiment of the many facets of artistic creation: by gathering together all the essential elements which went together to comprise the man Balzac and the influence he exerted, something new was formed, which was greater, more 'exaggerated' than the original man, but which had a more universal, more elemental significance.

All the things of the world could be subjected to the same process - even the most elusive and nebulous emotion could be given a concrete form.

In the years following 1902, Rilke attempted to consciously transform Rodin's theories of the plastic arts, so that they would also be valid for a new concept of poetry. The ideas expressed in the first Rodin lecture are repeated continually by Rilke in his correspondence and in critical essays, and are finally made manifest in poetic form in the Neue Gedichte. This first work on Rodin may therefore be regarded as a most important key for our understanding of many of these poems.

Before we actually come to examine specific examples of 'Dinggedichte' and their imagery, it would be profitable to briefly outline, as it is revealed in the poet's letters, the way in which Rilke formulated the concept of this type of poem.

One of the most important features of a work of art is its exactitude:

> Das Ding ist bestimmt, das Kunstding muss noch bestimmter sein; von allem Zufall fortgenommen, jeder Unklarheit entrückt, der Zeit enthoben und dem Raum gegeben, ist es dauernd geworden, fähig zur Ewigkeit.[8]

The work has no historical context; it is eternal. In order to be able to transpose a 'thing' into a lasting creation, the way in which the artist sees things is all important:

> Nur die Dinge reden zu mir. Rodins Dinge, die Dinge an den gotischen Kathedralen, die antikischen Dinge - alle Dinge, die vollkommene Dinge sind. Sie wiesen mich auf die Vorbilder hin; auf die bewegte lebendige Welt, einfach und ohne Deutung gesehen als Anlass zu den Dingen. Ich fange an, Neues zu sehen: schon sind mir Blumen oft so unendlich viel, und aus Tieren kamen mir Anregungen seltsamer Art. Und auch Menschen erfahre ich schon manchmal so....[9]

The everyday things of the world are but the visible manifestations of a deeper reality. The everyday world of experience points, if only one would develop the art of 'seeing,' to a realm of experience which lies beneath the surface of this outer shell. The 'things' represent 'Vorbilder,' i.e., there is contained in them an elemental pattern, or a component of the essence of life or 'Dasein.'

The process of comprehending that which is seen is described in a letter to Clara Rilke of the 8th. of March, 1907:

> Das Anschauen ist eine so wunderbare Sache, von der wir so wenig wissen; wir sind mit ihm ganz nach aussen gekehrt, aber gerade wenn wirs am meisten sind, scheinen in uns Dinge vor sich zu gehen, die auf das Unbeobachtetsein sehnsüchtig gewartet haben, und während sie sich, intakt und seltsam anonym, in uns vollziehen, ohne uns, - wächst in dem Gegenstand draussen ihre Bedeutung heran, ein überzeugender, starker, - ihr einzig möglicher Name, in dem wir das Geschehnis in unserem Innern selig und ehrerbietig erkennen, ohne selbst daran heranzureichen, es nur ganz leise, ganz von fern, unter den Zeichen eines eben noch fremden und schon im nächsten Augenblick aufs neue entfremdeten Dinges begreifend -.[10]

Here, Rilke tries to describe as exactly as possible the elusive process of experiencing impressions. It is as if the observer has no control over what his mind perceives.

He sees an object of the outside world, but the realm of the subconscious, which is peopled with anonymous but very real things, affects the final impression, independent of the conscious thoughts of the observer. The subconscious thoughts transpose themselves into the object, and give it its fullest meaning. This meaning is almost intangible within the observer - it is elusive, but nevertheless, for one fleeting instant, he is aware that he has captured the very essence of that object - that it has been given its 'only possible name.' The impression lasts but for a moment, but is intense and very real.

It is the aim of the poet to capture that fleeting moment where the essence of an object is revealed, and to give it permanence in the work of art. Katharina Kippenberg vividly describes this process thus: "Die Dinge strotzen von gekeltertem Leben. Sie sind dem Werden entrückt und ein Sein geworden."[11] The objects in a work of art cease to belong to the transient everyday world, and are shown to exist in and for themselves, static and immortalised.

The 'Ding,' i.e., the object described, is the initial impulse for the beginning of a process, whereby the poet's inner, subconscious impressions associate themselves with this concrete, visible object: the two are in some unknown way united, and then moulded by the artist into a 'Kunst-Ding,' which is in no way an impressionistic reproduction of the object, but is the crystallization of the poet's optical and intuitive observation. It is devoid of the artist's personality, yet is capable of evoking meaning. "Alle diese Gegenstände...werden mit unermüdlicher Geduld nach ihrem Dasein befragt, solange bis sie sich aufschliessen, und Zug um Zug ihr Dasein enthüllen."[12] The process which occurs, therefore, in a 'Dinggedicht' is the transforming of the external appearance of an object to reveal the hidden associations which that object might embody. It is the task of the poet to make these associations as 'sagbar,' as utterable, as clearly defined as possible, that is to say, to make their 'inwardness' visible.

Having examined the theoretical concept of the Dinggedicht, it would now be profitable to outline the poetic technique Rilke uses in the Neue Gedichte, in order to observe how the above theories were put into practice.

Paul Böckmann wrote of the Neue Gedichte:

> Es sind Gedichte, die sich von den Grundlagen der Erlebnis- und Stimmungslyrik aus nicht mehr fassen lassen und aus den Traditionen der Goethezeit herausführen; sie binden sich nicht an den Erlebnis-Augenblick, sondern sind aus der Bewältigung des Angeschauten erwachsen als ein persönliches Besitzergreifen der Aussenwelt. Dem Gedicht ist deshalb nicht mehr der Erlebnischarakter, sondern der Werk- und Bildcharakter wesentlich.[13]

Rilke was concerned, as has been shown, with capturing as precisely as possible the very essence of that which he was describing. In order to be able to accomplish this, his imagery had to achieve a high degree of intensity and exactitude. Poetry appeals directly to our senses through imagery - each individual image is the representation to the imagination of a sense experience; it suggests a mental picture, something seen in the mind's eye. Rilke attempted to give even the vaguest sense experience its most exact image: he attempted to find the 'visible equivalents' (sichtbare Äquivalente) for sense experiences; these images, as will be shown, could be concrete or abstract. They are employed to convey the precise nuances of that which was being described.

Each of the poems of the Neue Gedichte is precisely localized by its title; without the title, the poem itself would often be meaningless, as will be made clear. The poems have as their subjects works of art, mostly sculpture from Classical Antiquity, scenes from the Bible, mediæval religious art and architecture, human figures, human emotions, (such as parting, or the experience of death), animals and flowers, and inanimate objects such as a mountain or a tower. The title is in itself an image - a definite vision which the reader has in his mind before reading the poem. The poem itself will then consist of the poet's exploration of the original image; he examines it in every detail, and each image within the poem becomes the crystallization of the poet's experience concerning a certain aspect of the subject described. From the many images of the poem, one final image is formed, which frequently throws the title image into a new relief. The subject of the poem will then be revealed as having qualities, often elusive and intangible, to which the poet, with his ability to see with the utmost intensity, has given tangible utterance in the form of a firmly contoured plastic poem.

At this stage it would be useful to examine examples of poems from the Neue Gedichte, in order to illustrate Rilke's use of the above theories, and also to offer some insight into the nature of the imagery therein contained. We must constantly keep in mind the essential principles which Rilke used for the moulding of his 'Dinggedichte:'

a) the importance of the individual part for the whole;
b) the exactness of the imagery in order to convey the precise nuance;
c) that what we see in the poem is the crystallization of the poet's intuitive and optical impressions;
d) that the poem should make visible and utterable that which appears to be hidden and incomprehensible in an object, and which seems, in fact, to be the very essence of a particular aspect, or of the whole being, of the object described.

Although the poem "Der Panther" has very frequently been used by critics as a model of the 'Dinggedicht,' and has been interpreted many times, it will still be useful to use it here as an initial example, as it was one of the first poems of this type that Rilke composed, and serves to illustrate most poignantly the basic technique of a 'Dinggedicht.' Using this poem as a basis, we can then turn to a more abstract example.

Der Panther
Im Jardin des Plantes, Paris

Sein Blick ist vom Vorübergehn der Stäbe
so müd geworden, dass er nichts mehr hält.
Ihm ist, als ob es tausend Stäbe gäbe
und hinter tausend Stäben keine Welt.

Der weiche Gang geschmeidig starker Schritte,
der sich im allerkleinsten Kreise dreht,
ist wie ein Tanz von Kraft um eine Mitte,
in der betäubt ein grosser Wille steht.

Nur manchmal schiebt der Vorhang der Pupille
sich lautlos auf -. Dann geht ein Bild hinein,
geht durch der Glieder angespannte Stille -
und hört im Herzen auf zu sein.

The poem does not concern itself with an overall impressionistic portrayal of the animal, but by carefully examining three aspects of it visible to an observer, the poet clearly reveals the inner state of mind in which the panther finds itself.

Each stanza deals with each of the three aspects in turn - firstly the 'Blick,' the glance; secondly the gait and lastly the movement of the pupils of the animal and the way in which it perceives the images of the outside world. There is no need for any other external description of the many details of the animal's form, for the title itself may be regarded as an image, which the reader has already fixed in his mind. Without this title image the full significance of the poem would not be understood: one might perhaps presume that the poem deals with a large member of the cat family, but one could as equally well surmise that any large trapped animal formed the centre of its subject matter.

The structure of each stanza is almost identical; a certain visible feature of the animal is put before us as a concrete image, which then in turn reveals an aspect of its inner state.

In the first stanza the animal's glance is described as being dulled and mat; it is no longer capable of real vision because it has become too conditioned to the deadening monotony of its surroundings. This monotony is evoked by the recurring long 'ä' and 't' sounds, and a slow rhythm. The blurring of the panther's vision as he paces up and down past the bars of his cage is vividly protrayed in the last two lines by these 'ä' sounds, and also through the fact that the sentence contains no punctuation pauses. It is almost as if we ourselves view the bars through the perspective of the panther.

In the second stanza the gait of the animal is described, or rather concretely conveyed through a powerfully striking image. Its walk is 'soft' but 'powerful,' as it pads in circular motion around its cage; it is like a 'dance of energy' around a centrifugal point, and in this point there stands, muted, 'ein grosser Wille.' The panther is an animal of great strength and energy; it seems, in its state of captivity to have retained some of these physical qualities, but its will, its mental ability to absorb the things of the world about him and to respond accordingly, has been irrevocably dulled; this will would wish to reassert itself, but the spiritually deadening process of captivity has reached a too advanced stage for it to be revitalized.

The final stanza describes the process by which the panther sees. Only occasionally does he silently open his eyes: or rather, it seems that they open arbitrarily of their own accord ('schiebt der Vorhang der Pupille *sich* lautlos auf); the animal does not then deliberately receive and mentally absorb the image before him. His sheer indifference and listlessness are not conducive of any active participation, mental or physical, with the things of the outside world. Rather, that which he sees approaches him, enters into his consciousness, but is not acknowledged. The panther has ceased to be receptive to external stimuli; what is more, his own inner consciousness, his awareness of being a living thing, as it were, is dead.

In the poem, internal occurrences are described as concretely as the external ones - there is no dividing line, or change in the tone of the language between the two. By examining certain salient external features of the animal, Rilke succeeds in vividly revealing its inner state. This process is fulfilled with the subtle use of imagery; the poem comprises several images, which, when combined, serve to give one composite impression.

The imagery is not so much visual in the sense of being impressionistic, but seems rather to contain the quintessence of numerous associations. There is an undefinable 'rightness' about the individual image, which has the ability to *exactly* convey that to which it refers. An example of this can be seen in the lines 'Der weiche Gang geschmeidig starker Schritte/der sich im allerkleinsten Kreise dreht.' The juxtaposition of the words 'weich' and 'stark' convey precisely the image of the strong and powerful animal, padding softly, springingly with a sinuous grace around and around in its cage. The subordinate clause here serves to convey the rapid movement of the animal, its almost impatient force.

Movement is an all important factor in this poem: each of the three described features of the animal, its glance, gait and its pupils, moves - it is through the description of these movements that the inner state of the animal is brought to the surface. Its glance is 'tired,' which then suggests the inner mood of stagnant resignation; its gait, powerful, yet gentle, rapid but aimless, suggests the muting of a strong, dynamic will; the way in which it almost painfully opens its eyes and receives an image suggests a shattering inner emptiness; the 'tensed stillness' of the limbs hints at a dynamism that is waiting to explosively emerge, but is incapable of doing so. Paul Böckmann sums up the overall effect of the poem:

> ...So führt das beschreibende Wort auf ein von innen her bestimmtes Verhalten hin, ohne dass wir darum von einer Subjektivierung des Tieres sprechen könnten, aber auch ohne dass ihm darum schon ein Gefühl, eine Seele zugewiesen würde. Es zeigt sich nur ein Lebendiges, dem etwas geschieht. Der Blick, der Gang, die Bewegung der Pupille deuten auf einen von innen her begreifbaren Zusammenhang, auf die Situation, die dem Tier zugehört, sein Gefangensein und Müdewerden.[14]

From the series of images in the poem, one composite image emerges: the poet succeeds in capturing the mood, the 'Befindlichkeit' of the state of captivity, and the effect it has on an agile being. There is no personal message - the poet concretely conveys the crystallization of his optical and intuitive impressions with a high degree of exactitude, and with complete lack of personal emotion.

Not all the poems of the Neue Gedichte are as devoid of obscurity as is "Der Panther," mainly because the 'Befindlichkeit' which they attempt to embody is more elusive than that of the state of captivity. It would be of use here to take such a poem and to examine its imagery, in order to ascertain if it is used to the same ends, and as effectively, as in the above classical example of the 'Dinggedicht.'

Der Pavillon

Aber selbst noch durch die Flügeltüren
mit dem grünen regentrüben Glas
ist ein Spiegeln lächelnder Allüren
und ein Glanz von jenem Glück zu spüren,
das sich dort, wohin sie nicht mehr führen,
einst verbarg, verklärte und vergass.

Aber selbst noch in den Stein-Guirlanden
über der nicht mehr berührten Tür
ist ein Hang zur Heimlichkeit vorhanden
und ein stilles Mitgefühl dafür -,

und sie schauern manchmal, wie gespiegelt,
wenn ein Wind sie schattig überlief;
auch das Wappen, wie auf einem Brief
viel zu glücklich, überstürzt gesiegelt,

redet noch. Wie wenig man verscheuchte:
alles weiss noch, weint noch, tut noch weh -.
Und im Fortgehn durch die tränenfeuchte
abgelegene Allee

fühlt man lang noch auf dem Rand des Dachs
jene Urnen stehen, kalt, zerspalten:
doch entschlossen, noch zusammzuhalten
um die Asche alter Achs.

The title image here is not as precise as in the previous poem; the reader must have his own personal vision of a summer house or garden pavilion. The only parts of the building which Rilke mentions are the doors, with their dismal, green glass, the ornamental stonework over the door, the coat of arms, and the urns situated on the edge of the roof; we also learn that the avenue which leads up to it is isolated. From these few details, however, we are able to surmise that the pavilion lies probably in the grounds of the residence of some aristocratic family (it bears a coat of arms), is of solid appearance, probably constructed in the ornate Baroque style, (it is bedecked with 'Stein-Guirlanden'), is now forgotten and never visited, and has fallen into a state of decay.

Each of the concrete details given embodies for the poet an association of the past, which he attempts to describe exactly in words. The poem appears, as do many of the Neue Gedichte, to be the continuation and climax of a process of thought; it begins with an indecisive 'Aber selbst noch...,' as if it is the second half of an already begun sentence; as if the poet is on the point of reaching the essence of what he is experiencing.

The whole poem with its varying images constitutes an attempt to give utterance to an elusive emotional sensation; an examination of the subject matter will reveal the nature of the imagery, and the way in which we should approach the poem. As has been said, the title image is important, for we ourselves must have visible in our mind's eye what the poet is dealing with. In the course of the poem we then go through the same process of seeing and experiencing, as he does.

The first stanza deals with the associations of the green 'regentrübes' glass in the doors of the summer house. It is opaque, but through it seems to be reflected the joyous occurrences which once took place behind it. The words 'Spiegeln' and 'Glanz' are important with Rilke, for often, inanimate objects seem to radiate a basic 'Befindlichkeit.' A feeling of surprise is evoked by the words 'Aber selbst noch -' 'but even still' - it seems amazing that even after the passing of time these windows can still reflect the 'smiling allures,' and the mood of happiness which was once manifest behind them. The nature of the happiness which was experienced there, is shown to have been short-lived - it hid itself at first, then vibrantly came to the surface (verklärte), - then was forgotten. This description of the happiness has the power to evoke many associations - perhaps it was the result of a clandestine love-affair with some coquette. However, we are not really justified in putting forward such hypotheses, for Rilke makes no attempt to personalize that which he is describing. All that we do know, is that the feeling of a short-lived, intense happiness, and of the melancholy when it ended, is still retained in the surroundings where it occurred.

In the stonework there is a feeling of secrecy, and a sympathy for it - it is as if that which once occurred in that place found accord with the surroundings, which were to willingly preserve its atmosphere of secrecy. The coat of arms still speaks also: notice the way in which it is described - 'wie auf einem Brief/viel zu glücklich, überstürzt gesiegelt.' This unusual simile does not appear affected: although Rilke could sometimes be accused of preciosity in his choice of image in the Neue Gedichte, the image of the coat of arms is an example, somewhat humorous, of how the poet tries to convey the precise nuance of what he sees. We think of a coat of arms as being something which is representative of a certain type of ornate grandeur, even pomposity. Here, however, on the pavilion it appears to have a somewhat ridiculous effect, as if it had been haphazardly stuck on to the building: it appears to be over-enthusiastic, as it were, and quite out of place in its melancholy surroundings. It is devoid of the meaning for which it was originally placed there, but even so, this trivial object, according to Rilke, still speaks of the past.

> What gives an image its efficacy is less its vividness as an image than its character as a mental event peculiarly connected with sensation. It is, in a way in which no-one yet knows how to explain, a relict of sensation and our intellectual and emotional response to it depends far more upon its being, through this fact, a representative of sensation, than its sensory resemblance to one. An image may lose almost all its sensory nature to the point of becoming scarcely an image at all, a mere skeleton, and yet represent a sensation quite as adequately as if it were flaring with hallucinatory vividity.[15]

What I.A. Richards has stated here, is often the case of Rilke's images. At first sight, many of them appear to be obscure and unrelated to the context of the poem in which they occur. It is up to us, the readers, to carefully extract all the emotive sensations they contain, and then to fit them in with the general context of the poem. It is this 'hallucinatory vividity' which Richards describes, which gives many of Rilke's images their effectiveness. Often they can only be grasped by the intuitive perception of the sensitive reader, but that does not alter the fact that they are, more often than not, capable of conveying the precise nuance of a sensation.

In the last two stanzas is incorporated the theme of the poem. Rilke states that the memories associated with the happiness which had been experienced in the summer house, and its abrupt end, are still there, embodied in the objects which surrounded it: 'Alles weiss noch, weint noch, tut noch weh -.'

At that place, the past is still ever present - a theme which can be seen in other of the Neue Gedichte which concern themselves with old parks and gardens. What is more, there is a determination on the part of the objects of that natural setting to retain the past, even though they themselves are gradually crumbling away: the urns on the roof, cold and cracked, are resolved to hold themselves together 'around the ashes of old sighs.'

"Der Pavillon" differs from a poem such as "Der Panther" in that it is the depiction of what seems to be an intensely personal experience. It is, however, expressed in an impersonal way. The 'Ich'-form is only rarely employed in the Neue Gedichte; the reader never observes the poet undergoing a particular experience, but is led by him into the depths of that experience, so that he too feels what the poet has felt. In this way he often is made to feel that he is seeing familiar objects as if for the first time. Thus, in "Der Pavillon," the underlying theme that objects have the power to retain the essence of the past, even if in the present they are in a state of decay, is imparted to the reader as if he had discovered it for himself. This curious blend of subjective emotion expressed in an objective way is the hallmark of Rilke's poetic style in the Neue Gedichte. The imagery is often designed to appeal to the intuition rather than the intellect.

In the Neue Gedichte one should be prepared to approach each poem as one would approach the individual artefacts in a museum or an art gallery. In theory, each poem should have the capacity to reveal its meaning without the knowledge of background detail. As we shall see, however, this is not always the case, for Rilke often chooses subjects which are obscure, and when the poem is read there can be a breakdown in communication if the reader is not aware of the object around which the poem is moulded. Unlike a piece of sculpture or a painting, a poem is not a visible thing - its contours, its shades of meaning must, however, be made visible by the poet, and this he does through his choice of imagery. In ensuing chapters an attempt will be made through an examination of the imagery to show how Rilke 'sees' and makes visible his human or human-like figures and also to determine their significance.

CHAPTER II: IMAGERY FROM THE WORLD OF CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Rilke's intense preoccupation with the world of classical antiquity was directly derived as a result of studying Rodin's conception of Greek and Roman art, and its importance to him as a sculptor. In the first Rodin essay Rilke continually makes reference to the sculptor's antique subjects and the way in which they were conceived, and so it would be profitable to briefly examine some of the poet's remarks concerning them, for they have a direct bearing on his own plastic poetry. Indeed, it can be said that Rodin's antique works were those which most greatly impressed and influenced Rilke, for he regarded them as the very basis of Rodin's sculptural technique.

Rilke saw Rodin's plastic figures as having affinities with the art of earliest times, which had the capacity to reveal the innermost being of man - it was the 'Dingwerdung,'[1] the concrete manifestation of his hopes and fears. In Rodin's work every individual feature seemed to be vibrantly alive, so that the final impression was one of continual movement. This movement, states Rilke,[2] was that for which the sculpture of the ancient Greeks strove.

An extremely important feature of Rodin's art was the 'Gebärde,' - the gesture, the stance, in which the subject of the work finds itself. The 'Gebärde' has the power to express the attitude or mood of the subject - human hands, for example, could in themselves express yearning, losing, suffering, giving, taking.[3] The gestures of the figures of classical works were filled with a calm, equanimous grandeur - the mysteries of life were present in their features. In modern times, however, this had completely changed - the 'gestures' of modern man, he who had lost sight of the deeper meaning of existence, had become inculcated with a perplexed panic, nervousness, impatience and impetuousity. Rodin also moulded such gestures into 'Kunst-Dinge;' they carried within themselves "das Leben aller Leidenschaften....das Blühen aller Lüste und aller Laster Last."[4]

While working for Rodin in Paris, Rilke spent much of his time in the Bibliothèque Nationale and in the Louvre, where he had the opportunity to observe the works of ancient Greece. He slowly and with great deliberation sought after their meaning. His sojourns in Rome and Capri were made in the hope that he would be able to absorb the atmosphere in which they were created, and in order to gain a greater understanding of them, thus enabling him to recreate them in words.[5] The poet stated that he believed he had found the essence of the works of antiquity in Rodin's bronze figurine of a tiger.[6] This miniature contained "hunderttausend Stellen wie eine ganz grosse Sache, hunderttausend Stellen, die alle lebendig, bewegt und verschieden sind."[7] All these minute parts project the movement and the strength of the animal, not with stark, violent force, but with subtle plasticity. Rodin's antique works contain "eine stille Durchbildung und Belebung der Oberfläche;"[8] on the surface of things, they might appear to be static, but each part is really vibrantly alive.

In a letter of August 15th, 1903, to Lou Andreas-Salomé Rilke reveals his position regarding the 'things' of the antique world. He will approach them "als Sucher der inneren Zukunft in dieser Vergangenheit, in der viel Ewiges eingeschlossen war,"[9] that is, he regards them as not belonging to any specific stage in the development of civilization, but as being universal, with a meaning for eternity. He states that these 'things' do not need names; they are complete within themselves, and if they are observed as only belonging to a specific era, this can only serve to mar our understanding of them:

> ....denn sie haben ihr Gesicht in die Erde gehalten und haben alle Benennung und Bedeutung von sich abgetan; und als man sie fand, da haben sie sich, leicht, über die Erde erhoben und sind fast unter die Vögel gegangen, so sehr des Raumes und wie Sterne stehend über der unsteten Zeit. Darin, glaube ich, liegt der unvergleichliche Wert dieser wiedergefundenen Dinge, dass man sie so ganz wie unbekannte betrachten kann; man kennt ihre Absicht nicht, und es hängt sich (für den Unwissenschaftlichen wenigstens) nichts Stoffliches an sie an, keine nebensächliche Stimme unterbricht die Stille ihres gesammelten Daseins, und ihre Dauer ist ohne Rückblick und Angst. Die Meister sind nichts, aus denen sie stammen, kein missverstandener Ruhm färbt ihre Formen, die rein sind, keine Geschichte überschattet ihre entkleidete Klarheit -: sie sind. Und das ist alles. So denke ich mir die antikische Kunst.[10]

These works do not need a temporal context for their understanding; it is not necessary to know who created them, because they are devoid of the individual personality of the artist: they express the emotions of all men. These 'things' simply exist "ursprungslos wie die Dinge in der Natur"[11] - they are a part of nature, unspoilt and uncorrupted, and in such a state of purity that they are able to express elemental truth.

Rilke tells us how we should approach such works of art, when he speaks in the first Rodin lecture of how best the sculptor's works should be interpreted:

> Nie ist ein Stoff bei Rodin an ein Kunst-Ding gebunden, wie ein Tier an einen Baum. Er lebt irgendwo in der Nähe des Dinges und lebt von ihm, etwa wie der Kustos einer Sammlung. Man erfährt manches, wenn man ihn ruft; wenn man es aber versteht, ohne ihn auszukommen, ist man mehr allein und ungestört und erfährt noch mehr.[12]

What Rilke is advocating here, is complete abandonment of the intellect and total reliance on intuitive perception - the work of art should commune to the sensitive observer directly, without any foreknowledge of the circumstances in which it was produced, or to what it specifically refers.

Almost all of the antique poems of the Neue Gedichte are Rilke's refashioning of works of art - painting, sculpture, pieces of pottery, where he attempts in words to expose the essential meaning of these objects. These poems will be dealt with in some detail, as an examination of their imagery will reveal certain fundamental traits of Rilke's style.

Each part of the Neue Gedichte opens with a poem concerning the Greek god Apollo. Both "Früher Apollo"[13] and "Archaïscher Torso Apollos"[14] are based on statues - the former from 'Apollon' by Thera, which was a particular favourite of Rilke's, and the latter from the remains of a sixth-century work discovered in Milet, which the poet studied in the Louvre. The concentrated sonnet form of the poems almost gives the impression that Rilke was attempting to preserve the well-moulded plasticity of the original sculptured works.

"Früher Apollo" concentrates solely on an intense description of the head of the Greek god. In this figure Rilke attempts to capture the original freshness and brilliance of Greek art and culture. As Phoebus, Apollo was the god of light, and Rilke seizes upon this one aspect and projects it, as if it were the deity's most important attribute. There is no explanatory introduction, no building up of atmosphere towards a climax in the poem - the god, and the dazzling freshness and brilliance which he emits, are immediately put before us. The head contains the 'brilliance' of all poetry which emits a light so overpowering that it is almost fatal to the observer who looks directly at it. This concentrated brilliance is conveyed by a relatively simple simile - it is like observing a spring morning through trees, which are as yet leafless. The words 'Frühling' and 'Morgen' heighten the atmosphere of early, untainted freshness. This early version of Apollo, however, has not yet attained the greatest potential of its poetic powers - even though there is no shadow wherever he looks, his temples are "zu kühl für Lorbeer" - his powers, great though they are, are not yet developed enough to receive the highest honours. Rilke then uses an abstract image to convey the artistic potency of the god when he will have achieved his fullest powers - inspiration, the power of his poetic spirit will manifest itself on his brow like the thrusting growth of a rose garden. This image can have many associations - a rose garden is heavily scented; it reaches full bloom in the height of summer, and is something of great beauty. Yet here, it also has a thrusting energy - it is 'hochstämmig.' The single leaves of this rose garden are like the utterances which will be emitted by this arch-paragon of poets, the god Apollo. In this early state he does not sing, for the subjects of his songs are now being instilled in to him ('eingeflösst'); only later will they appear as pure poetry.

Through the figure of Apollo, Rilke provides a composite image of latent, dynamic poetic potential, which is in the process of slowly developing towards the time when it will reach its greatest force and emerge into the world. The god in this early statue resembles a dynamo of poetic energy.

Although the poem is constructed within a carefully moulded framework, which might suggest tranquillity, there is contained in the imagery a contrast of moods and associations. The first image we are presented with contains a vision of freshness and dazzling brilliance; the god appears to emit a halo of bright light, which could be fatal in its intensity. Despite this, his temples are too 'cool' to bear the laurel wreath. The god's mouth is silent and unused - his only expression is a smile, something which might be thought to be essentially static, but here this is not the case, as it is silently drinking in inspiration.

The technique Rilke uses to describe the god is one which can be observed in many of the 'Dinggedichte': the opening image conveys an overall impression of the subject - here it is one of blinding light - and then certain features are individually highlighted: in this case, the god's 'Schaun,' his forehead, his brows, his mouth, his smile. Although he radiates a dynamic energy, his present state is essentially one of tranquillity - his mouth is 'niegebraucht und blinkend;' he smiles elusively; he does not seek inspiration - it flows into him. This is contrasted with the dynamic image of his future state when those latent powers within him will be ready to emerge - his mouth will 'quake' ('beben'); his words will be like the many leaves of a rose garden - leaves are soft and fragile, but they will be cast away ('hintreiben') from his mouth with an air of dynamic finality. The juxtaposition of the words 'ausgelöst' and 'hintreiben' suggests a tension of opposite forces, and is, as will be seen, a common device in the Neue Gedichte.

In "Archaïscher Torso Apollos" the images of blinding brilliance reach their greatest intensity. The poem concerns itself with the ancient headless and armless torso of the god, and Rilke shows that even though the statue has no eyes, every individual part of it can see with the greatest intensity. The torso, although in a state of decay,[15] still radiates a brilliant light - it glows like a candelabra. The force of this brilliance is conveyed with images of great poignancy - its breast is blinding to the observer; the body sparkles like the coat of a wild animal; the light it emits explodes from its contours as if from a star. Even though on the surface of things the statue appears to be unmoving, the imagery suggests the opposite: verbs and gerunds such as 'zurückschrauben,' 'glänzen,' 'blenden,' 'Drehen,' 'Lächeln,' 'flimmern,' 'ausbrechen,' 'sehen,' all point to the fact that it is still vibrantly alive.

As Werner Kohlschmidt points out, Rilke was concerned in the poem "Früher Apollo" with making visible through words "...griechische Wirklichkeit wie sie in unzweideutigen erhaltenen Dingen noch lebt und fassbar ist, in ihrem Eigen-Sein, ohne jede subjektive Zutat...."[16] The observer looks at the statue, and admires its brilliance. In "Archaïscher Torso Apollos," Rilke goes even further, by suggesting that the sheer power and brilliance of the statue, the representative of 'reines Dasein' and pure poetry, would serve as a model to man, making him wish to 'change his life,' and to emulate that which once existed in human civilization, but which now has become invisible.

The three poems "Eranna an Sappho,"[17] "Sappho an Eranna,"[18] and "Sappho an Alkaïos"[19] all deal with the theme of pure love and its power over the human soul. In the first, Eranna, who is in love with Sappho, describes in what state she has been left as a result of her complete love for the Greek poetess. She has been inwardly torn apart; she is like a spear which has been hurled afar; she has become estranged from those intimates around her, and feels as if she has been given away to the elements. Sappho has completely taken over her very existence; Eranna no longer belongs to herself:

> denn die schöne Göttin in der Mitte
> ihrer Mythen glüht und lebt mein Leben.

The image of intense purity and light which the truly inspired artist emits appears again in these lines, as does the completely overwhelming effect of her being on those who have surrendered themselves absolutely to her power.

The inner tension which Eranna experiences is conveyed through images of polar movement: 'Dein Erklingen/warf mich weit,' 'Mich kann keiner wiederbringen,' 'Ich allein bin fern und fortgegeben.' The vivid abstract image of Eranna's trembling ('und ich zittere wie eine Bitte.') is a good example of Rilke's ability to convey 'hallucinatory vividity.'

The same tensions are felt in the poem "Sappho an Eranna," where Sappho describes what her love will do to the girl, who has become an 'umrankter Stab' - a staff, around which love has almost chokingly entwined itself:

> Wie das Sterben will ich dich durchdringen
> und dich weitergeben wie das Grab
> an das Alles.

Through images of a powerful polar thrusting movement ('dich durchdringen,' 'dich weitergeben') Rilke conveys the effects of love on the lover and the beloved.

Rilke used as his subject for the poem "Sappho an Alkaïos" a painting on an antique vase. In a letter of July 25th, 1907[20] he describes the painting to Clara Rilke, who herself found the poem obscure. Alkaios, the Greek poet, stands before Sappho with his head lowered. He explains to the poetess that he has something to say to her, but his shame holds him back. Sappho replies that if his thoughts were noble, there would be no need for him to lower his eyes. This poem is an example of how Rilke observes a gesture or 'Gebärde' of an object, and interprets it in his own way. Here he portrays Alkaios as being in love with Sappho, but the poetess spurns his love, for it would destroy her art: 'Geh und lass mich, dass zu meiner Leier/komme, was du abhältst.' Rilke presumably called the poem a fragment, for, with the exception of only one poem, the only surviving works of Sappho are fragments. Rilke's poem would then seem to have actually been written by the Lesbian poetess and to have suddenly come to light from the depths of antiquity. The poem has a faintly mysterious quality about it, arising from the fact that it takes the form of a fragmented conversation between two people, which, because of lack of information concerning the reason why this conversation has come about, appears to originate out of nothingness. The poem can only be fully understood when it is viewed within the context of the Sappho legend, where the Lesbian poetess used the young girls with which she was associated and her relationships with them as the subjects for her intense love poetry. From this, one of the main reasons why she and the girls by whom she is surrounded, 'ich Wissende/und jene mit mir Wissenden,' cannot receive the love of a man, becomes clear: they would lose the purity of their 'süßes Mädchentum.'

The image where Sappho states that she and her followers are in a state of absolute purity -

....daß Mytilene
wie ein Apfelgarten in der Nacht
duftete vom Wachsen unsrer Brüste.

is an example of synaesthesia, which is not intended to be erotic, but rather the opposite, as it suggests the translucent freshness of chastity and demonstrates Rilke's ability to convey an image of silent movement in all things. It is an intuitive, sensuous image. The poem shows Sappho to be the arch-protagonist of pure love, free from all carnal desire. Rilke brings to the surface the silent emotion visible in the Greek poet's gesture - the image of Alkaïos, with his head bowed low before Sappho, suggests that he is fully aware of his sinful guilt.

A composite image of lightness, purity and innocence is also to be found in the poem "Kretische Artemis."[21] Once again, in order to be able to understand the full significance of the poem, one must be aware of that which Artemis represents in Greek mythology. Amongst other things, she was goddess of the hunt and of childbirth, who also protected the young of all species.

In the poem she is presented as a light, ethereal creature, born of the breezes and as free as the air. Her forehead is like 'ein lichter Gegenstand;' it is as if it had been formed by the smooth 'Gegenwind der leichten Tiere.' Her raiment covers her 'unbewussten Brüste' - it is as if it had been moulded to her 'wie ein wechselvolles Vorgefühl' - like a 'fluctuating presentiment' - i.e., the wispy, gossamer-like garb which covers her purity and innocence is almost invisible, yet Rilke has given it a concrete, plastic form.

Artemis is also seen to be a creature of strong will, as she rides out with the nymphs and hounds, testing out her bow. Although on first sight, she might have appeared delicate and flimsy, the other side of her character, her almost headstrong steadfastness and resolution is conveyed by the image of her bow being tightly bound as she rides 'in den harten hohen Gurt.' In the last stanza it is seen that her duties as the goddess of childbirth are a burden to her - when sometimes summoned 'aus fremden Siedelungen,' by the screams of childbirth, she becomes angry. Artemis belongs purely to the sphere of the gods; the images which describe her show her to be as light as the wind, surrounded by an ethereal aura, but also full of self confidence and resolution. She is 'geschürzt und kühl,' yet storms into the distance with her hunting companions. As a pure god-like entity, the human sphere does not interest her. Once again, Rilke has presented an image of 'reines Dasein.'

The poem "Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes.,"[22] in contrast to those already examined, contains a greater wealth of detail and movement: it does not concentrate on the single 'Gebärde,' but contains several. Its sources of inspiration were the Greek 'Orpheus' relief in the Louvre, and the Roman reproduction which Rilke viewed in the National Museum at Naples in 1904. The relief depicts the fateful moment where Orpheus turns around to look at his wife Eurydike on their journey out of the underworld - a gesture which can only mean that Eurydike will be lost to him for ever. Rilke completely expands upon that which is seen in the relief, and also alters the meaning of the Greek myth in order to illustrate his own personal view of life and death. In the original story, Orpheus succeeded in obtaining the release of Eurydike from the underworld through the power of his song. He was allowed to bring her back from Hades, accompanied by the messenger of the gods, Hermes, on the condition that he would not turn around to look at her, for this would mean her instant return to the realm of death. As C.M. Bowra points out[23] the Greeks symbolized in this myth how song has the power to recall the dead, but cannot make them directly visible. Rilke, however, shows here that death is final, and that the dead, having left life, pass into the earth and become a part of nature, not to be forgotten, but to take part in the life-giving process of the earth. When Orpheus turns back to look at Eurydike, he sees not his wife or a living creature, but something that has become an irrevocable part of death.

The poem opens with a vivid image contrasting darkness and light. Hades is described as being a 'wunderliches Bergwerk' of souls, and the three figures Orpheus, Eurydike and Hermes stand out 'Wie stille Silbererze' against a background of darkness. On their passage from the world of death to the world of life, they walk between 'roots' - a symbol for the link between life and death. Through roots which penetrate the earth, death forces itself upwards into life, becoming an inextricable part of it. The path from death to life is described in terms of an abyss - it is empty and 'wesenlos.' The density of the darkness 'schwer wie Porphyr' is contrasted with the milder colours of the roadway, which is 'wie eine lange Bleiche.' The flowing rhythm, and the accumulation of details give this description an almost Miltonic epic grandeur.

The three figures on their upward climb are each described in turn. Orpheus, who is depicted here as being essentially a creature of life, lacks the tranquillity and composed resignation which comes from the state of death. He is 'stumm' and 'ungeduldig.' He is described in terms of impatient movement - 'Ohne zu kauen frass sein Schritt den Weg/in grossen Bissen;' his hands are clenched and heavy. The lyre which has become meaningless to him is 'eingewachsen' in his left hand; this image seems to stand out like a feature on a stone relief. In describing the god's glance ('Blick') and hearing ('Gehör'), Rilke gives them movement, which conveys exactly their uncertainty and doubt.

> Und seine Sinne waren wie entzweit:
> indes der Blick ihm wie ein Hund vorauslief,
> umkehrte, kam und immer wieder weit
> und wartend an der nächsten Wendung stand, -
> blieb sein Gehör wie ein Geruch zurück.

Here again is to be found the tension of opposites which is one of the features of Rilke's imagery.

Eurydike is first described as a woman, who, because she was so greatly loved, was so greatly lamented. Lament, the noise of crying or confusion often forms the background to Rilke's antique poems - wherever there is a pure being, such as Eurydike, Sappho, Alkestis or Artemis, there is in the background the noise of human suffering, usually from one who realizes that he himself will never attain such purity. The images used to describe Eurydike come as a complete contrast to those of Orpheus. She walks slowly, 'unsicher, sanft und ohne Ungeduld.' She was as one who was full of some great hope. In her state of death she has become complete:

> Sie war in sich. Und ihr Gestorbensein
> erfüllte sie wie Fülle.
> Wie eine Frucht von Süssigkeit und Dunkel,
> so war sie voll von ihrem grossen Tode,
> der also neu war, daß sie nichts begriff.

- she has entered into a state which the adult rarely achieves on earth. It is a new 'Mädchentum' - the same state which Sappho, the purest of lovers, wished to preserve at all costs. In this higher state, it is emphasized that Eurydike can no longer fulfil her role as the wife of Orpheus:

> ....ihr Geschlecht war zu
> wie eine junge Blume gegen Abend,
> und ihre Hände waren der Vermählung
> so sehr entwöhnt....

- this sensual image suggests purity and complete surrender to her new state of being. The images describing her state of death are similar to those describing Eranna's all-consuming love for Sappho:

Sie war schon aufgelöst wie langes Haar
und hingegeben wie gefallner Regen
und ausgeteilt wie hundertfacher Vorrat.

- she is no longer an individual with an individual's interests, but has become a part of everything around her. Pure death, just as pure love is an elemental 'Befindlichkeit' of 'Sein.' Eurydike has become 'Wurzel;' through death she has become an integral part of that which gives life.

The poem "Alkestis"[24] is almost entirely composed of images of movement, which vividly convey the 'Gebärden' of the characters. The messenger of the gods who has come to take Admetus to the underworld appears at the wedding feast 'plötzlich...hineingeworfen...wie ein neuer Zusatz,' unnoticed by everyone except by the bridegroom at the head of the table. His sheer terror tears him inwardly apart - he is:

wie in die Höh gerissen, nicht mehr liegend,
und überall und mit dem ganzen Wesen
ein Fremdes spiegelnd, das ihn furchtbar ansprach.

Suddenly amidst the revelry, there is silence. Admetus can hide his fear no longer - it bursts forth out of him:

Der aber brach die Schale seines Schreckens
in Stücken ab und streckte seine Hände
heraus aus ihr, um mit dem Gott zu handeln.

- in this posture he implores the god to grant him a reprieve, if only for the shortest time. When this is denied, he screams 'wie seine Mutter aufschrie beim Gebären' - the verb 'aufschreien' suggests an intense upward movement. His parents approach him, but he demonstrates no love towards them: he regards them merely as two worn out people, who have fulfilled their duties in life and are now worthless. One of them should die instead of him. A rapid succession of images conveys the violence with which he grasps them, and then callously throws them aside, and the sudden change in his mood, when, in a blinding flash, he sees a substitute in his bride Alkestis:

> Und beide hielt er sie wie Opfertiere
> in Einem Griff. Auf einmal liess er los
> und stiess die Alten fort, voll Einfall, strahlend
> und atemholend, rufend: Kreon, Kreon!

The gentle image of the beautiful girl is in complete contrast to the emotionally charged violence of her surroundings - she is 'leicht und traurig' in her bridal gown. Previously, Admetus had always regarded her as a friend, a girl. Suddenly faced with death, she has become a woman - 'Er blieb zurück, und das, was kam, war sie.' Admetus waits for her to come to him, and he 'painfully' opens up his arms to receive her. But, like Eurydike, she is no longer of this life: she has experienced the intensity of pure love, which in itself is a form of death, and through this she has already bade the world farewell. It is only fitting that she should take the place of Admetus in the underworld. As the god leads her away, Admetus rushed after them:

> Der stürzte taumelnd zu den beiden hin
> und griff nach ihnen wie im Traum.

As Alkestis is at the entrance of the underworld, she turns around and smiles at her former lover - a gesture which seems to mean the promise of return. The image of the smile is frequent in the Neue Gedichte - it seems to suggest a certain all-knowingness, a certain sublimity, an awareness of the true meaning of things. The final 'Gebärde' in the poem is the image of Alkestis kneeling, his hands covering his face, in order that he might never lose sight of this smile.

The whole poem consists of a series of images conveying the changing 'Gebärden' of Admetus: fear, imploring for mercy, screaming at his fate, panic, respite, tragic relief. In the midst of this, Alkestis' sublime composure is highlighted.

In the poem "Geburt der Venus"[25] it can be seen how Rilke illuminates with vivid concrete imagery every surface and contour of the object he describes in order to build up a final composite image. The source of the poem was a painting by Botticelli which Rilke studied in Florence. His poem seems to capture some of the Renaissance grandeur and vividness of the original work.

As has been stated, Rilke's images fall mainly into the two categories of concrete and abstract. The abstract images demand a more intuitive understanding and are not vividly visual: examples of this type can be seen in some of the poems already examined -

> '...und ich zittere wie eine Bitte,' ("Eranna an Sappho"),
> 'sein Gehör (blieb) wie ein Geruch zurück,' ("Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes."),

'ihr Gestorbensein/erfüllte sie wie Fülle,' ("Orpheus.
Eurydike. Hermes.").
'mit einem Lächeln, hell wie eine Hoffnung,' ("Alkestis").

In "Geburt der Venus," however, the similes are all visual, and all suggest movement, strength or delicateness; for example: -

'...die Gelenke lebten wie die Kehlen/von Trinkenden,'
'Und in dem Kelch des Beckens lag der Leib
wie eine junge Frucht in eines Kindes Hand,'
'wie ein Bestand von Birken im April,
warm, leer und unverborgen, lag die Scham,'

- the goddess's neck is 'wie ein Strahl/und wie ein Blumenstiel, darin der Saft steigt;' her outstretched arms are like the necks of swans as they search for the shore.

The poem opens with images of great violence as the sea is preparing to give birth to the goddess; her emergence from the womb of the sea is described with bold sexual imagery. Every surface and contour of her body is described in detail, and each in terms of movement. Like many of Rilke's antique figures, Venus is surrounded by an atmosphere of pristine freshness - her body unfolded itself '...in die Kühle/hinein und in den unberührten Frühwind.' It contains surfaces of translucent light, ('wie Monde stiegen klar die Kniee auf'), and mysterious darkness, ('In seines Nabels engen Becher war/das ganze Dunkel dieses hellen Lebens'). The goddess is of monumental proportions - Rilke speaks of the 'Wolkenränder' of her thighs, and the 'waagrechtes Erhobensein' of her face; her first breaths have the mighty force of the wind. A feeling of powerful movement is given by the use of verbs and nouns which convey a dynamic tension - 'Unruh,' 'Aufruhr,' 'aufbrechen,' 'herabfallen,' 'Abgrund,' 'aufstehen,' 'aufschlagen,' 'entfalten,' 'sich recken,' 'steigen,' 'zurückweichen,' 'sich spannen,' 'sich heben,' 'rauschen,' etc. After the grandiose movements of the birth of the goddess, the rhythm changes, as we see her walking and running after having reached the shore. The final image of the dolphin being thrown, like some discarded object, 'Tot, rot und offen' out of the sea, comes as a startling contrast to what has already occurred. It seems to represent the placenta or uterus[26] which sustained the goddess before her birth. Hans Schwerte interprets the image thus:

> Dieses "Tot, rot und offen" ist nicht nur von jener harten "Genauigkeit," die der spätere Rilke oft bis ins Quälende steigern wird: es ist auch eine Absage ans reine, in sich schwingende Gefühl und eine erste Hinwendung in die - zu bestehenden - Abgründe und Untergründe allen - selbst des schönsten und seligsten - Seins. Hier ist wahrhaftig schon an das Schöne das Schreckliche gebunden.[27]

This is an essential part of Rilke's 'Weltbild' - he believed in the oneness of all things; just as beauty and ugliness are not opposites, but are inextricably bound,[28] so are life and death merely the progression of one and the same process. In looking at the beautiful, the ugly can be found; in love, hate; in life, death.

It will be noticed that in Rilke's antique poems there is a lack of specific colour imagery - colours are imaginatively evoked, rather than directly presented. In the Apollo poems the purity and force of the god's divine power is expressed in terms of 'Glanz,' 'glühen,' 'blenden.' The delicateness of the transfigured Alkestis is conveyed through her paleness; the joy of fulfillment that she feels in her complete state of death is 'hell wie eine Hoffnung.' The path from Hades in "Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes" is described in varying shades of darkness - it is 'schwer wie Porphyr,' a very dense, darkly coloured blue; the pathway is 'wie eine lange Bleiche.' The three climbing figures stand out brilliantly against this murky background - 'Wie stille Silbererze gingen sie.' The only colour mentioned in the poem is the blue cloak of Orpheus, but even this blends in with the darkness. The colours therefore are based on varying shades of light and dark, and have an untainted, elemental quality about them. They give the impression that the Greek world was only surrounded by darkness and light; that it stood very near to the dawning of creation.

The 'Gebärden' of the characters, which are in themselves images, also express elemental states of emotion: tranquillity, guilt, sublimity, yearning, purity, rage, grandiose majesty. In the first Rodin lecture, Rilke describes the poetry of Baudelaire, and the influence it had on the French sculptor:

> Und in diesen Versen gab es Stellen, die heraustraten aus der Schrift, die nicht geschrieben, sondern geformt schienen, Worte und Gruppen von Worten, die geschmolzen waren in den heissen Händen des Dichters, Zeilen, die sich wie Reliefs anfühlten, und Sonette, die wie Säulen mit verworrenen Kapitälen die Last eines bangen Gedankens trugen.[29]

By carefully moulding words in plastic form, Rilke achieves the same effect in his antique poems. Each piece, although depicting a static figure or a mythological event of epic proportions, contains images of movement and the tension of opposite forces, producing an effect of pulsating motion under a surface of tranquillity, so that they become charged with vibrant undercurrents of emotional association.

Against a background of darkness and confusion, Rilke highlights 'reines Dasein' with images of light and purity, so that that which would at first appear enigmatic to the sensibilities of a modern civilization is projected outwards so as to become 'entkleidete Klarheit.'

CHAPTER III: BIBLICAL IMAGERY

. The Neue Gedichte contains a number of poems which centre around biblical characters - the figure of the prophet, Christ and Mary Magdalene amongst others. One of the most remarkable features of the majority of these poems is the way in which Rilke completely alters or modifies the occurrences he uses upon which these poems are based, thereby frequently giving them new meaning. The process involved here in which an epic biblical event is transformed into a 'Kunst-Ding' is essentially the same as that which Rilke applies to the subjects of his other 'Dinggedichte' - he seizes upon that which for him is the central idea, the essence, the most pregnant moment of the occurrence and concentrates solely on this one aspect, subordinating or entirely omitting all other detail. The poem "Klage um Jonathan"[1] for example, is based on the biblical text Samuel II, Chapter 1, verses 19-27, where David is lamenting over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan; verse 26 reads, "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been to me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." From this remark Rilke fashions a whole poem concerning David's love for Jonathan, interpreting it as having been highly erotic in nature, even though this is not stressed in the actual text. In treating biblical passages in this way, in altering their literal meaning, Rilke is able to highlight and project the essence of a particular mood or association, which for him they contain.

In the poems which have the Old Testament prophet as their subject, Rilke is concerned with portraying the effects on these chosen people of being the mediators between a divine power, God, and Man. Rilke always showed a distinct preference for the characters of the Old Testament, and the era in which they lived, rather than for those of the New Testament, for he felt that they were nearer to their God, and that they could directly commune with Him. In a letter to Henriette Löbl in 1915, written when the poet was undergoing an intense spiritual crisis as a result of the First World War, Rilke stated:

> Im Alten Testament gab es solche Heimsuchungen, deren Ränder und Grenzen man nicht sah, die ganze Welt war wie jetzt in eine einzige Heimsuchung verkehrt, - aber damals waren weniger Menschen und grössere, und Gott kannte jeden Einzelnen und zerschlug ihn mit eigener Hand. Und die es überstanden, kamen zu Jahren nach Jahrhunderten und schauten als Greise über die Heimsuchung hinaus ins Klare, in dem ihre Kinder und Kinderskinder wohnten und baueten. Wäre nicht die Bibel, so bliebe ich fast ganz ohne Umgang, denn welche Bücher gelten jetzt und wieviele Menschen gibt es, denen man etwas zu sagen hätte?[2]

Rilke believed that in the Old Testament era, God was still the stern father who acted with severity towards his unruly children: they were ever conscious of Him, and should they ever falter in their belief, they were strictly punished. The prophets were God's mouthpiece, whose commands had to be obeyed - they towered above all other men, and belonged both to the divine and the human spheres. The Old Testament era was a time of punishment and reward, of savage plagues and divine grace; but whatever His chosen people had to endure in the process of their education, they were always led by God the Father, and always returned to Him.

In the poem "Josuas Landtag,"[3] Rilke recaptures through the use of stark, forceful imagery, the tone of almost savage severity and sheer power which were inherent in the voice of the prophet, as he imparted the words of God to Man. Joshua is seen from the very beginning as being apart from his people. He is a man of towering strength; the greatness of his power as a prophet can be felt by the force of his voice. It is like a mighty river bursting through dams; it contains the clamour 'von dreissig Schlachten;' it has the same shattering effect on the boundaries of people's lives as did the trumpets on the walls of Jericho. Those who hear it are gripped completely by its might; those who are the objects of its wrath are rendered 'wehrlos' and 'überwältigt' - even God had had occasion to obey the wishes of this man, 'dieser Alte,' in order that His will be done. There is an arrogance in the man, which stems from the knowledge that he and God are as one: 'Ich und mein Haus, wir bleiben ihm vermählt.' The images of anger and violence are continued in the poem "Ein Prophet,"[4] which in a long sonorous sentence seem to capture the atmosphere of threatening solemnity which accompanies many of the passages of the Old Testament. The Old Testament God in this poem is seen to be in a state of perpetual anger - His judgements are uttered through the mouth of the prophet, who remains unscathed by their violence. This anger is to be seen in the eyes of the prophet, which are 'hell vom Feuerschein.' The words he utters are not his own, but:

> andre, harte,: Eisenstücke, Steine,
> die er schmelzen muss wie ein Vulkan,
>
> um sie in dem Ausbruch seines Mundes
> auszuwerfen, welcher flucht und flucht;

- he has surrendered himself completely to God's will and entirely eliminated his own personality. The images of the poem convey, in concrete terms, harsh and violent emotions.

In the poem "Jeremia,"[5] the figure of the prophet is seen in a state of bitter anguish and resentment: in being the implement of God, his whole life has been spent in imparting His violent wrath to the people. He addresses God as 'Du Rasender,' 'Unersättlicher,' He who inflamed his quiet heart so that it is now as ferocious as that of the lion, and who transformed his mouth into an open wound which continually bleeds destruction. The Old Testament God here seems to use His powers arbitrarily: he 'dreams up,' ('ersinnen'), ever new sources of anguish for the prophet to utter, often seemingly without due reason. The prophet regards his voice as always having been 'ein Heulen' - almost like the enraged peevishness of a spoilt child intent on having its own way.

In "Tröstung des Elia,"[6] however, this God is seen to have a more merciful side. Elija has just proven to the Israelites that his God is the only true God, he is then given the task of slaughtering the false prophets of Baal. The force and violence of this act is conveyed in the following image:

hatte er dann nicht Hunderte zerhauen,
weil sie ihm stanken mit dem Baal im Mund,
am Bache schlachtend bis ins Abendgrauen,
das mit dem Regengrauen sich gross verband.

After committing this terrible deed, the mental anguish which the prophet has had to endure, instead of lessening, is increased: Ahab's wife, Jezebel, who still worships Baal, sends out an order to have Elija destroyed. Rilke portrays him as running 'Wie ein Irrer durch das Land' - he has endured so much for the Lord, that finally as a man, he has been completely broken, and does not have the strength to continue - 'Gott, gebrauche mich nicht. Ich bin entzwei.' His resolution to carry out God's commands falters; he is torn between himself as an ordinary man with human weaknesses, and his divine function as a 'man of God.' In this state of extreme agitation, an angel gives him food and drink, and he receives the presence of God 'im sanften Sausen seines Blutes.' The fires of the Lord, the symbol of His raging power, are empty - they come to Elija 'fast wie aus Scham' - God has tested Elija to the most extreme limits of human endurance, and when he has been almost broken, He comes, almost apologetically, to offer sustenance.

The two poems "Saul unter den Propheten,"[7] and "Samuels Erscheinung vor Saul"[8] have as their theme the decline of Saul's powers of prophecy. In the first poem it is described how he prophesied at the height of his powers - 'als ob jede Ader/mündete in einen Mund aus Erz' - his very being issued forth the words of God. After his unjust dispute with David, however, thus incurring God's wrath, his powers diminish.

This again is expressed through the image of the mouth:

> Und sein Mund war wie der Mund der Traufen,
> der die Güsse, die zusammenlaufen,
> fallen lässt, eh er sie fasst.

In the second poem, the woman of Endor makes the spirit of Samuel appear before Saul. This great prophet, angry at having been brought back from the dead, tells Saul that prophecies can only come from God - the prophet, the man, is nothing without the favour of the Lord. Again, the image of the mouth is used to convey this fact.

The imagery of these poems captures the violence and epic solemnity of the Old Testament era. God is seen to be in a state of perpetual anger, making colossal demands on His prophets and His chosen people, who live in a world of lament, surrounded by cries, curses and fear. Varying images of the prophet are given - from a pillar of strength and courage, to a human being who becomes almost broken under the terrible burden which has been placed upon him. Rilke frequently deviates from the original biblical accounts, so much so that some of the figures, for example Elija, become almost unrecognizable; his purpose lies in the fact that he attempted to crystallize exactly the atmosphere of the times, so that the need for precise contextual location becomes minimal.

The poems abound with words of stark, dynamic severity: 'schlachten,' 'zermalmen,' 'zerstiessen,' 'zerstören,' 'heulen,' 'wälzen,' 'überwältigen,' 'zerspalten' - all images, which convey an almost arbitrary cruelty. The prophets, as well as the people, followed the Old Testament God blindly, never experiencing the need to understand His purpose. The poems all contain images of violent movement and restlessness, which are vividly visual and devoid of obscurity, stemming from the fact that the emotions conveyed, - anger, resentment, fear, do not lend themselves to images of a more subtle, elusive nature.

Certain of the poems of the Neue Gedichte which centre around Old Testament figures have no religious meaning in the deeper sense: they are Rilke's own personal interpretations of biblical events, in which certain elemental moods are evoked. The poems "David singt vor Saul," "Abisag," and "Klage um Jonathan," all have themes which deal with erotic love. These works were composed in the same manner as "Sappho an Alkaïos," or "Orpheus. Eurydike. Hermes," that is, the poet examines an object, be it an antique relief, a vase, or a passage from the Bible, and then expands upon it so as to give it a completely new meaning, which stems solely from the poet's own imagination. In doing so, however, it will be shown that Rilke still preserves an epic, biblical quality in the imagery.

In the poem "David singt vor Saul,"[9] David's song has the power of awakening in the king memories of his past experiences of love. This song is only perfunctorily mentioned in the Bible, and is completely devoid of any sexual connotations. In Rilke's poem, David is portrayed as being the siren-like seducer of Saul. His song has a mystical quality; the poem implies that Saul is secretly longing for the union for which David yearns - because, however, Saul is an old man and David a young boy, the relationship between them is not one of close intimacy, but of self imposed distance. David's song evokes this distance, and also conjures up a vision of a mystical union between the two. Their emotions are confused; within the bounds of convention, their relationship should not exist, yet in some way, fate seems to force them together, and condones the relationship, which is shown to be fruitful:

> Sterne treiben uns verwirrt entgegen,
> und wir fallen endlich wie ein Regen,
> und es blüht, wo dieser Regen fiel.

The song has the power to conjure up erotic visions of the past, designed to sexually arouse Saul, and to make him see that past experiences can be relived again through David. The following image is full of sexual connotations:

> Mädchen blühen, die du noch erkannt,
> die jetzt Frauen sind und mich verführen;
> den Geruch der Jungfraun kannst du spüren,
> und die Knaben stehen angespannt
> schlank und atmend, an verschwiegenen Türen.

This image contains a feeling of intense, breathless movement, and the heat of suppressed desire waiting to find an outlet. It is not precisely visual, but is highly emotive, having a direct appeal to our intuitive senses.

David has been completely spiritually overwhelmed by Saul; his song exhausts the king, and points the way to him to endless future possibilities. The boy's heart is 'verwaist'

- he seeks the union with Saul in order to complete his spiritual being. The combination of young and old would form a perfect spiritual equilibrium - 'fast wie ein Stern, das kreist.' In this poem, hidden, secret, yet overpowering emotions are brought to the surface with imagery which has highly emotive overtones. The images seem to cut across the boundaries of concrete and abstract and contain both of these elements. Thus, a concrete, visible object can convey an elusive association, and something which is not clearly defined can evoke a very real sensation or shade of meaning.

The poem "Abisag"[10] also has as its theme the sexual and spiritual relationship of a young and an old person. In this instance, Abisag and the ageing king David are in an artificial set of circumstances: the young girl has been forced to lie with the king, and the two parts of the poem portray the situation from the perspective of each of the two characters. David is portrayed as a fragile old man, and Abisag as a child. She is frightened, and this is reflected in her surroundings:

> und alles, was die Nacht war, kam und scharte
> mit Bangen und Verlangen sich um sie.

Abisag's spirit, however, is far away; it is as if she belongs to the stars - nevertheless she makes no attempt to escape from the situation, and stays with the old man. The two characters are contrasted through images of lightness and darkness - the girl is 'jungfräulich,' and as light as a spirit; the king is dark and cold. The second part of the poem is seen through the perspective of the ageing king. His mind is full of the past; his life seems to have been one of frustrated emptiness and unfulfilled desires. Like Saul, he is confused, and when the opportunity arises to form a spiritual and physical union with another human being, he is incapable of doing so. For him, Abisag is like a mystical being from another world; the distance between them both is emphasized by the image of his lying 'unter dem Sternbild ihrer stillen Brüste' - even though the two people lie in close physical proximity, it is as if Abisag is not of this world but of the stars. To the king, she is not just a young girl, but 'ein Kundiger der Frauen' - she represents all the mystical and sexual qualities of womanhood. Faced with this, the king loses all confidence, and becomes afraid; he does not turn his feelings outward in the hope of mutual reciprocation from the girl, but turns completely in on himself, thereby rendering impossible any spiritual union.

The images of this poem are more of an abstract, sensory nature, than concretely visible, and serve to emphasize the inner contrast between the young girl and the old man. She has an airy, ethereal quality, which is reflected in what she sees:

> Die Sterne zitterten wie ihresgleichen,
> ein Duft ging suchend durch das Schlafgemach,
> der Vorhang rührte sich und gab ein Zeichen,
> und leise ging ihr Blick dem Zeichen nach -.

- in this image Rilke conveys the silent movement and meaning of external detail, which does not merely form a background to the main occurrences, but is projected into the foreground, and mirrors the spiritual sensations of the young girl. Thus inner and outer occurrences are inextricably fused.

Through the various images the king is seen to be cold and passive: he does not see Abisag as a fragile young girl, but as a force against which he cannot compete. He feels a sense of failure when he realizes that: 'ihres Gefühles grüne Rute/neigte sich nicht herab zu seinem Grund.' As Wolfgang Müller points out, this image indicates that there is no erotic contact between the two, and there can be no union between the two spheres in which they exist.[11] The image of the 'green rod' suggests a freshness and naivety which could not flourish in the cold darkness of the old man's soul.

The two poems "Abisag" and "David singt vor Saul" concern themselves with the possibility of the spiritual and physical union between young and old. The emotions experienced by the characters seem to belong to a mystical sphere, which is not of this world: this is conveyed through the image of the star - ('unter dem Sternbild ihrer stillen Brüste,' 'Sterne treiben uns verwirrt entgegen,' '(wir sind) fast wie ein Gestirn, das kreist'). In each case the older character is 'confused,' and the opportunity which is now within his grasp, to begin, perhaps for the last time, a new spiritual relationship with one who embodies all the qualities of youthful freshness, and energy, is not seized, because he lacks the spiritual vigour to give himself completely, and render himself vulnerable to one who is in a position to take advantage of his trust. In "Abisag," there is no direct sexual imagery - the erotic side of the situation is conveyed by the position in which the characters find themselves; the girl is bound to the old man and arches over him.

The imagery of "David singt vor Saul" is of a sultry, erotic nature, full of emotive, sexual associations - for example:

> sieh dir diese Knabenhand da an:
> glaubst du, König, daß sie die Oktaven,
> eines Leibes noch nicht greifen kann?

This soft, seductive imagery stands in sharp contrast with an image which suggests violent frustration:

> Mein verwaistes Herz und dein verworrnes
> hängen in den Wolken deines Zornes,
> wütend ineinander eingebissen
> und zu einem einzigen verkrallt.

The juxtaposition of softly erotic with harsher, more violent imagery is also to be seen in the poem "Klage um Jonathan,"[12] where it is implied that David's relationship with Jonathan was of an erotic, rather than a brotherly nature.

> ....Wärme meiner Wangen.
> O daß dich einer noch einmal
> erzeugte, wenn sein Samen in ihm glänzt.

-contrasted with an image of stark violence and basic carnal overtones:

> wie wunde Tiere auf den Lagern löhren,
> möcht ich mich legen mit Geschrei:

denn da und da, an meinen scheusten Orten,
bist du mir ausgerissen wie das Haar,
das in den Achselhöhlen wächst und dorten,
wo ich ein Spiel für Frauen war,...

It is a feature of the imagery of these poems that they reflect every aspect of the inner state of the characters involved. Each poem is concerned with the spiritual and physical relationship of one person with another, and the deep-rooted emotions of the characters are brought to the surface through heavily emotive imagery. In "Abisag" the tension between the trembling naivety and anxiety of the young girl, and the hopeless frustration of the old king is conveyed through images of night, darkness, the hooting of an owl, the silent movements of inanimate objects ('ein Duft,' 'der Vorhang'), coldness and chastity on the one hand, and emptiness, confusion and estrangement from self ('Sein wirres Leben lag/verlassen wie verrufene Meeresküste'), on the other. Images of motionlessness set the external scene, viz., 'Sie lag;' 'Der König sass;' 'er horchte wie ein Hund,' then images of silent movement are accumulated, producing, yet again the effect of motion in tranquillity. In "David singt vor Saul" the imagery is of a heavily erotic nature, which reveals David's seductive longing, and harsher images which convey the brittleness of Saul's resistance to the boy's advances. In "Klage um Jonathan" David is shown, through images of searing violence, to be experiencing a feeling of angry frustration, rather than a sense of tragic loss. Here also, the beloved is shown, as in the previous poem, to have the power to create a spiritual equilibrium in the one who loves - this is conveyed through the image of Jonathan's being able to unravel David's confused senses like a ball of twine.

The two remaining Old Testament poems "Esther" and "Absaloms Abfall" are thematically unconnected; once again they are Rilke's remodelling of two isolated biblical events, and bear only the slightest resemblance to the original.

In the poem "Esther"[13] the external action concerns itself with Esther's visit to the king Ahasuerus, and his touching her with his sceptre as a sign of grace. External action is reduced to a minimum, and the main character's inner state of mind is brought to the surface. The poem opens with an image of epic proportions:

> Die Dienerinnen kämmten sieben Tage
> die Asche ihres Grams und ihrer Plage
> Neige und Niederschlag aus ihrem Haar,
> und trugen es und sonnten es im Freien
> und speisten es mit reinen Spezereien
> noch diesen Tag und den:...

This image conveys the idea that Esther is being slowly prepared for the ordeal to come: the external action of the combing of the hair and the annointing of it with spices serves to reveal an inner occurrence. The slow, but steady movement of time is conveyed by the repetition of the word 'und,' and the length of the time by the phrase 'noch diesen Tag und den;' an epic effect is achieved not by a large accumulation of detail, therefore, but with skilful use of concentrated language. A similar effect is also achieved in

"Tröstung des Elia" with the phrase 'er hatte das getan und dies.' The whole image, again while not impressionistic, conveys the vivid mental picture of a lonely woman with long flowing tresses, (her hair had to be 'carried' out into the sunlight), being consoled by a multitude of attendants. The scene then suddenly changes when the time comes for Esther to finally go to the king; the contrast is marked with the words, 'dann aber war/die Zeit gekommen.' The images which follow convey the tension between the power of the king and the anxiety of Esther. His influence is to be felt in the external surroundings - the palace is 'threateningly open.' This image is an example of how Rilke conveys human sensations in terms of non-human things, and is a feature of many of his images, which will be discussed in more detail at a later stage. With every step Esther takes she loses some of her own personal identity, and becomes completely filled with the presence and authority of the king. His radiance inflames the ruby in her crown; her very being becomes a vessel which overflows with his might; it is almost as if she has become part of his surroundings - the greenness of the walls covers her. The king towers up before her, 'so wirklich wie ein Ding;' with this image it is shown that he is not some supernatural force, which only exists in the woman's mind, but is an immanent, concrete reality. When finally she stands before him, she no longer sees him, but experiences his presence only from within - her being has completely surrendered itself to his power, not voluntarily, but naturally.

The poem "Absaloms Abfall"[14] is the description of an epic situation through the medium of vivid, sensuous imagery. As with many of the poems of the Neue Gedichte, there is no explanatory introduction, but the reader is drawn directly and abruptly into the centre of the action. Marianne Sievers says of the poem[15] that it resembles more 'eine heitere Legende' than a biblical poem, because of the 'Schwelgen in Farben' and the reproduction of sensuous impressions. Absalom is described with an epic grandeur - he is 'Der herrlich Erhellte,' who blinds everyone with his radiance. He has insatiable, carnal appetites. The vivid, yet abstract image of his leading his armies 'voran wie ein Stern dem Jahr' conveys a vast, epic sweeping movement. The imagery of the poem conveys all the bustle, clamour, violence and exaggeration of a medieval epic saga - the trumpeters raise their instruments 'mit Geblitz;' the wind which they cause swells the waving silken flags; the people are loudly exuberant, ('jauchzend'); Absalom hacks to pieces even the most tenacious warrior 'zu roten Stücken von Toten;' his murder is described with stark vividness - Joab

> durchrannte den schlanken Kläger
> und seine Waffenträger
> durchbohrten ihn rechts und links.

- the last line strikingly conveys the stabbing movements of the spears of his executioners.

The imagery of these poems succeeds in recapturing the atmosphere which seems to prevail in many of the incidents which occur in the Old Testament. In the poems which concern the Old Testament prophets, images of violence and eruptive, dynamic movement prevail. With the exception of Joshua and the archetypal figure in "Ein Prophet," each character finds himself torn in conflict between his position as a human being with a will of his own, and his function as a mere instrument for the expression of God's wishes.

The imagery of the poems which deal with erotic love is, for the most part, of a soft sensuous nature, and might be said to have certain affinities with the voluptuous language of the Song of Solomon. Combined with imagery of this nature are also images which suggest confusion, frustration, and the tensions of great spiritual conflicts.

All these poems contain what might be termed as epic distance; that is, when we read them, we are aware that they treat of situations of a bygone age, and that the characters are of a larger than life stature, although the emotions they experience are often of an elemental, universal nature.

The poems which are based on New Testament figures are completely different in tone to those which centre around Old Testament figures. No attempt is made to capture the original biblical atmosphere - the poems express Rilke's own personal vision of the figure of Christ, and also of Mary Magdalen. As will be seen, they were not for Rilke mythical, divine figures, but archetypes of humanity, experiencing human emotions and desires.

The poem "Der Ölbaumgarten"[16] portrays Christ not as the Saviour of the world undergoing his severest trial, but as one of the countless individuals who suddenly comes to the realization that he is alone in the world, and that there is no one to whom he can turn for aid. Christ, after all he has endured, is forced to realize that his life has all been in vain, and that God does not really exist, ('der Du nicht bist'). He feels that he has been wantonly misused by something that had no right to lay claim on his individuality, and as a result of this, he feels bitterly ashamed at his own naive credulity.

The initial image of the poem shows that Christ is at one with his surroundings, ('aufgelöst im Ölgelände'); the words 'grau,' 'Staub,' and 'Staubigsein' convey a mood of tired resignation; Christ is not portrayed here as a divine figure, but as an ordinary human being on the brink of despair. The urgency and panic of his self-questioning is conveyed through short, sharp sentences. The image of the angel and the fact that he does not acknowledge Christ emphasizes that he is not considered by God to be His son, but an ordinary mortal who has failed in his purpose. The images of the night are interesting examples of how Rilke conveys an impression of movement and gives life to that which would normally be thought to be static. Priscilla Washburn Shaw calls this a 'kinesthetic apprehension of seeing'[17] - it is almost as if we feel in some undefinable, intuitive way, the presence and movement of the night. 'Ach es kam die Nacht/und blätterte gleichgültig in den Bäumen.' - it is listless; it 'leafs uninterestedly in the trees,' like some reader haphazardly browsing through books on library shelves, not in the slightest way interested in what is going on around him. This impression is heightened in the lines:

> Die Nacht, die kam, war keine ungemeine;
> so gehen hunderte vorbei.
> Da schlafen Hunde und da liegen Steine.
> Ach eine traurige, ach irgendeine,
> die wartet, bis es wieder Morgen sei.

The juxtaposition of the words 'gehen' and 'kommen' suggest a regular, impassive movement, and the images of sleeping dogs, lying stones, and the woman or girl waiting languidly for morning, all build up a composite image of silent, almost static activity, which does not hurriedly move, but quietly breathes. This silent movement forms a sharp contrast to Christ's frantic pleas, so that once again a tension of opposites is felt.

The final image of the poem serves to emphasize Jesus' state of being an abject outcast; those, like he, who lose their very self, are also deserted by those who should be closest to them - '...sie sind preisgegeben von den Vätern/ und ausgeschlossen aus der Mütter Schooss.' The words 'preisgegeben' and 'ausgeschlossen' have an air of crushing finality. It is a feature of Rilke's imagery that the most powerful emotions are often expressed in simple, unpretentious terms; the effect is reached with the subtle use of word tensions, as can be seen from the above example.

The poem "Kreuzigung"[18] completes the image of Christ as being the most abject of human beings. There is no divine aura around the crucifixion - the whole affair is sordid, and we feel no sympathy for Christ, who dies like a common criminal. A rough mob presses up to watch the gruesome display; the executioners are totally indifferent to what they have performed, and are depicted as being boorish, cruel butchers. No external details of the setting are mentioned apart from the barren 'Galgenplatz' but attention is focused on the crowd, the executioners, the incident of the vinegar-soaked sponge being handed to Christ, and his death. An atmosphere of cruel merriment and callous indifference pervades. The fact that Christ is nothing more than a frail mortal, and dies not with dignity but in the depths of degradation is conveyed by his 'schwindendes Gehust' and his bawling out like a tormented animal ('brüllen') on hearing the distant cries of Mary. The images do not vividly portray the incident in great visual detail, but focus on certain aspects of it, so that the basic mood, which in the eyes of the poet prevailed, is projected into the foreground. Thus, such words and phrases as 'Galgenplatz,' 'die schweren Knechte,' 'eine grosse Fratze kehrend,' 'fleckig wie ein Selcher,' 'Lust,' 'schwindendes Gehust,' 'Spiel,' 'brüllen' stand out, and with these sparse details, a vivid emotive atmosphere is conveyed, and a composite image of degradation and arbitrary cruelty is formed.

The poem "Abendmahl"[19] does not contain images of an emotive, sensory nature, and as such it tends towards obscurity. A fairly detailed analysis of the work might serve to throw some light on to its meaning. The first two lines point to the fact that that which is eternal will finally remain, but that it is difficult in life to distinguish between the essential and the unessential. Our attention is then directly focused on the event of the Last Supper; it seems to stand out clearly from the confusion of life: -

> Erkennst du durch das Dämmern der Geschäfte
> im klaren Hinterraum das Abendmahl:

-notice that this is a form of rhetorical question; the poet is pointing the way and putting the scene before us, and not specifically asking us if we can perceive what he sees - it is there, and we are actually observing it. There then follows a description of the 'Gebärden' of the gathered assembly of the disciples and Christ, although these are never named as such. Their actions seem quite common-place - how they pass the food, how they make polite conversation. But it would seem that not one of them is aware of the full import of the occasion, which was to play such a great role in the Christian belief:

> Aus ihren Händen heben sich die Zeichen;
> sie wissen nicht, daß sie sie tun

- they are acting as if that which was taking place, were a normal, everyday occurrence.

The last six lines of the poem are somewhat enigmatic:

> Denn da ist keiner, der nicht allerorten
> heimlich von hinnen geht, indem er weilt.
>
> Und sitzt nicht immer einer unter ihnen,
> der seine Eltern, die ihm ängstlich dienen,

wegschenkt an ihre abgetane Zeit?
(Sie zu verkaufen, ist ihm schon zu weit.)

-the first two lines can only be a reference to Judas, but Rilke seems to be pointing out that he is not to be distinguished from the others - by just looking at this scene, we cannot interpret that which is really taking place in the minds of those present. The last stanza must be a reference to Christ: here again, he is not presented as the Saviour of the world, but as one who like Admet has deserted his parents once they have ceased to be of use to him. The last line almost borders on absolute blasphemy, and obviously points to a personal view of the poet.

Palpably visible imagery in this poem is reduced to an absolute minimum - it concentrates solely on the gestures of the disciples and Christ, which are, according to the poet, impossible on the surface of things, to interpret. One could never surmise, implies Rilke, that there is someone present who is about to betray Christ. The vision of Christ at the end of the poem is entirely esoteric. By not naming those figures who actually participated in the original Last Supper, Rilke seems in some way to be referring not just to that single incident, but to every occasion when the Last Supper is religiously celebrated in the form of Holy Communion. If this is so, then he has reduced to nothing the religious value of this holy ritual, for he infers that it is basically meaningless for those who perform it. This interpretation, however, can only remain conjecture, for, owing to the lack of emotive, sensory anchors in the form of pregnant images, this poem must be regarded as being obscure, and is merely a nebulous, personal vision of the poet.

In the poems "Pietà"[20] and "Der Auferstandene,"[21] Christ and Mary Magdalen are portrayed as having been lovers. "Pietà" deals with the element of frustrated love - Mary sees the naked body of Christ for the first time, and quietly laments the fact that a union between them had never taken place. In her eyes, Christ existed solely for her, and his heart was her possession and not that of all of humanity. The image of Mary washing Christ's feet is the only 'intuitively' visible image in the poem:

> Wie standen sie verwirrt in meinen Haaren
> und wie ein weisses Wild im Dornenbusch

- this conveys the idea of a pure youth, who suddenly finds himself in a state of anxious confusion when engulfed by the power of love. This image is yet another example of how an internal mood is expressed through the medium of external features. The 'weisses Wild im Dornenbusch' is not merely a visual image describing the feet of Christ but seems to refer to his vulnerability in a hostile world. The other images of the poem are readily intelligible, and convey the tragic pathos of a sensuous young girl who has lost the object of her all-embracing love.

"Der Auferstandene" depicts Mary Magdalen as being the archetype of Rilke's concept of the female lover, whose love is so intense that she does not wish to possess the object of her love, but through it experiences a universal love, which embraces and transcends all things. Her lover is not the end-goal of her love, but is only someone who enables her to experience the initial stages of love in its highest form, which increases more and more, until the lover himself becomes no longer the sole vessel for this love, which reaches out, over and above him. Even if he should leave, the woman's love remains, and increases, so as to embrace all things. Rilke calls this love of the female lover 'ihr tragisches Hinauslieben über den Gegenstand:'[22] it transcends every object, and with every object that is loved, the intensity of the love increases and knows no boundaries. It is this 'besitzlose Liebe,' a love that does not attempt to engulf and surround the objects of its passion, which enables the lover to absorb and love all things of the world. In this way the lover transcends the bounds of the self, for it is no longer of any importance, and the space which it leaves in the lover's soul becomes filled with the world, indeed, becomes a part of it. This leads to loneliness, for the lover can never completely identify herself with any one single object. The state of mind of the female lover resembles that of the poet, who distances himself from the world in order to receive it within him. Christ teaches Mary to love in this way by finally refusing to give himself to her:

> um aus ihr die Liebende zu formen
> die sich nicht mehr zu Geliebten neigt,
> weil sie, hingerissen von enormen
> Stürmen, seine Stimme übersteigt.

Mary's inner emotions are brought to the surface through concrete images which make these emotions seem almost visible;

> und sie sank ans Kreuz in dem Kostüme
> eines Schmerzes, welches ganz besetzt
> war mit ihrer Liebe größten Steinen.

This image conveys the impression that Mary visibly displays the grief she is suffering - it is projected outwards, as it were. This is contrasted with the inner state of hollowness ('Höhle') which she feels when Christ finally denies her the comfort and tenderness of his love, ('das Erleichtende der Öle/und des Rührens Vorgefühl'); at this point she realizes that her love no longer exists solely for him, but has extended beyond, to a higher plane.

The poems which deal with the figures of Christ and Mary Magdalen are not as rich in colourful imagery as the poems which centre around Old Testament figures, nor do they contain their epic exaggeration. There are no images of stark violence, or sultry sensuality - Christ and Mary experience emotions which are far more on a realistic plane rather than shrouded with a veil of epic distance. They are presented as ordinary human beings enduring the tragedy and pathos of life as experienced by the young of every generation.

The figures in the biblical poems of the Neue Gedichte are not presented as well-rounded individual characters, but as types. They all appear as being in a state of conflict, either with God, with another human being or with themselves. Rilke brings to the surface in these poems a complex series of human emotions - anger, longing, despair, lust, and uses these figures and the circumstances in which they find themselves as a vehicle through which to express these emotions. Although the characters belong specifically to the biblical era, the emotions they experience are universal. Rilke is not concerned in these poems with merely presenting a series of animated historical tableaux, but with reproducing certain existential states of mind. The poet uses biblical figures in the way that he does, because for him they seem to embody these elemental emotions in an exemplary way and thus have a relevance which is not only restricted to the age in which they lived.

CHAPTER IV: THE IMAGERY OF THE HUMAN-FIGURE POEMS

Just as the inanimate things of the Neue Gedichte stand alone, and are lifted by the poet out of their external milieu so as to focus our attention directly upon them and their inner state, so it is with the poems which deal with human figures, which penetrate into the very being of their subjects, but which, for the most part, do not contain images of a richly visual nature.

The poems dealing with female figures are individual studies portraying women at varying stages of their lives, from the onset of adulthood to old age,[1] and also those who are in the process of overcoming an affliction, such as illness or blindness.[2]

The poem "Eine Welke"[3] portrays a frail woman, whom life has left behind to live in loneliness. She has lost her own identity; certain of her possessions remind her of the girl she once was, but the longing to relive the past has now become deadened within her. She superficially and mechanically attempts to be her earlier self, but it now seems that she is inwardly estranged from it - it has become for her like some distant relative, ('eine ferne Verwandte'). The image we obtain of the woman is not formed by a description of her features, but of her actions. The title conveys the idea of a faded, withered old woman; the only image in the poem which verifies this is contained in the opening two lines:

> Leicht, wie nach ihrem Tode
> trägt sie die Handschuh, das Tuch.

She seems so fragile that it is almost as if she were no longer living. That she is inwardly timid and withdrawn is reflected in the image of her meticulously taking care of her 'ängstliches Zimmer,' which is reminiscent of the 'ängstliche Vitrine' in the poem "Ein Frauen-Schicksal,"[4] where a similar idea is conveyed, and is yet another example of how Rilke often reflects the inner state of mind of his subjects through their external surroundings. An important feature of the imagery of this poem is the fact that concrete details are not put before us in the form of firmly contoured images, but rather by implication - for example, the lines: -

> Ein Duft aus ihrer Kommode
> verdrängte den lieben Geruch
> an dem sie sich früher erkannte.

This suggests that a long passage of time has elapsed since the woman experienced the delights of her girlhood - the time when she felt herself to be a real person, vibrant and alive - and her present state. The smell, perhaps of old clothes, has completely suppressed those scents which reminded her of herself in earlier times. Rilke's positioning of the words 'Duft' and 'Geruch' in the poem illustrates his ability to subtly extract very fine nuances in the meanings of words. The former suggests a lightly scented fragrance, whereas the latter has more earthy connotations. One might have expected a reversal of the position of these nouns, viz., the 'Geruch' of the chest of drawers and the 'Duft' of the subject's girlhood. By using these nouns in the position that he has, however, Rilke suggests that the oldness of the contents of the chest of drawers seems to have a sweet, sickly fragrance ('Duft'), whereas the woman's girlhood seems to have been surrounded by a more sensual 'Geruch.'

The final image which we gain of the old woman, therefore, is not one of sharp clarity, but rather is built up into a composite whole through subtle implication and nuance. The simplicity of her present existence is also reflected in the simplicity of the choice of image.

The poem "Die Greisin"[5] is a delightful study of the composed wisdom which an old lady has attained, in contrast to those who frivolously live out their lives in superficial manner, unconcerned with its deeper significance, and with the reasons for their actions - the 'weisse Freundinnen mitten im Heute.' No firmly contoured image of the old woman is conveyed: rather, she is made to come alive through two 'Gebärden' - firstly the movement she makes with her chin, when she suppresses her true feelings on hearing the frivolous naivety of those around her:

> Und das Kinn, im Niederfalle,
> lehnt sich an die weisse Koralle,
> die den Schal zur Stirne nimmt.

- a downward movement, suggesting impatient resignation; and secondly, her laughing loudly, when she can suppress her feelings no more:

> Einmal aber, bei einem Gelache,
> holt sie aus springenden Lidern zwei wache
> Blicke und zeigt diese harte Sache,

> wie man aus einem geheimen Fache
> schöne ererbte Steine nimmt.

The image of her suddenly opening her eyes and 'pulling out' two alert glances is vivid and striking; this movement conveys the sharp, agile intensity of the way in which she looks out, which in turn is intensified even more, by the use of 'jewels' and the 'secret compartment,' as the visible equivalents for the way in which she sees. Thus, the only image we obtain of the old woman is her bonneted head and her sparkling eyes, but this is all that is needed to make her appear before us as a very real character.

The three poems "Die Genesende,"[6] "Die Erwachsene,"[7] and "Die Erblindende,"[8] portray the process of how three women experience suddenly a change in their lives and find a new identity. The titles of the poems formed with present participles seem to suggest the movement inherent in this transformation process. Again, these poems cannot be called firmly contoured portraits, but rather reveal psychological states of mind.

In "Die Genesende" the process whereby the convalescing woman refinds her identity is revealed through the 'Gebärde' of her raising her hand to caress her chin. The poem opens with a description of the capricious elusiveness of life, and how it whimsically plays with her:

> Wie ein Singen kommt und geht in Gassen
> und sich nähert und sich wieder scheut,
> flügelschlagend, manchmal fast zu fassen
> und wieder weit hinausgestreut:

- this image conveys the fleeting intangibility of life by comparing it to something which can be experienced, but not seen ('ein Singen,' which beats its wings like a bird in flight), and also through verbs of polar movement, which convey sensations and tensions operating in varying directions.

The woman's hand is seen to have almost an independent will of its own - she does not move it upwards to stroke her chin - rather, it does so of its own accord. The use of the words 'hartes Kinn' and 'hartgewordene Hand' implies that she has hardened herself to life, and can now accept what fate sends her. Through this gesture she becomes conscious of her own body again; during her illness, her hand seemed to contain all the raging powers of her sickness, 'Fieber... voller Widersinn,' - now, when it is raised to her face, it does so 'wie mit blühender Berührung;' it seems to be blossoming with health again. The whole poem is centred therefore around one 'Gebärde,' and through this image, the inner state of mind of the woman is brought to the surface.

The poem "Die Erblindende" is also concerned with revealing of the inner state of mind of its subject through the poet's own interpretation of the external gesture. It is shown how the woman suddenly accepts the fact that she is going blind. At first, the poet states that there seems to be nothing unusual about her appearance; he then focuses our attention on the small details of her actions, which point to the fact that she is apart from those around her, and is not participating actively in any external event, but is undergoing an inner spiritual change. Minute details, such as the way she holds her cup and the almost painful way she smiles, are the first hints given that she is unlike the other members of the gathered assembly; her faltering walk, 'so wie eine, welche gleich/wird singen müssen und vor vielen Leuten,' suggests that she is on the verge of reaching a new realization concerning her affliction, which, in turn, makes her feel ecstatically happy. The image of light shining on her bright eyes, as if on a pond, suggests the idea that external, visible influences no longer penetrate into her being, but are merely reflected back to the outside world. The fact that her eyes are 'happy' ('sich freuen'), shows that this is not regarded as a tragedy. A similar image is to be seen in "Der Blinde"[9] -

> ...Und wie auf einem Blatt
> ist auf ihm der Widerschein der Dinge
> aufgemalt; er nimmt ihn nicht hinein.

- although this image does not specifically refer to his eyes, but rather to his whole body. The final image of the woman 'flying,' suggests that in her blindness a new world has been opened up to her, and, after her initial trepidation, she completely accepts entry into it, so that it does not overwhelm her. In fact, she goes out fearlessly of her own accord to meet it.

In "Die Erwachsene," the subject experiences the change from girlhood to womanhood. As a child, she accepted everything simply as it was - innocently and completely: now, the onset of adulthood, conveyed here through the image of the 'first white veil,' which glides slowly over her open face, is as a barrier preventing her from understanding the world around her. In this image, again, something which is essentially invisible is given a concrete form. The images in the poem are not of a directly visible nature however. Rilke describes how, as a child, the joys and cares of life stood upon her - 'wie Bäume stehen, wachsend und gerade;' this is a concrete image, which attempts to make visible an invisible process. He then continues with an unusual image, which conveys the idea that everything the girl had experienced had sometimes seemed clear, while at other times was shrouded in a veil of mystery - 'ganz Bild und bildlos wie die Bundeslade.' The unusual image of the Ark of the Covenant is used as the visible equivalent for something which is essentially elusive - it is a notion in our minds with biblical connotations, which, although we think we can see it, has, in fact, never been seen. In the same way, the girl, as a child, experienced life - it has rushed past her as a series of pictures of images, out of which she has not been able to form any concretely tangible meanings. Life for her was 'das Fliegende, Entfliehende, Entfernte/das Ungeheuere, noch Unerlernte,' all images which suggest an immediacy of experience, but a lack of underlying perception as to their cause and effect. All this she accepted, never allowing herself to be quashed by its onerous immensity. By totally surrendering herself to the immediacy of experience as a child, she showed a quiet, devoted composure, conveyed through the simile of the water bearer carrying the full pitcher on her shoulders. It is an important feature of many of the images contained in Rilke's similes that their function is not to evoke an atmosphere, but to define as precisely as possible a certain nuance or aspect of the subject in question. This point will be discussed more fully when we come to view the images discussed and the interrelationships between them as a whole. Thus here, the composure of the girl is likened to an image which is readily familiar, and defines precisely her attitude.

It is a feature of the latter three poems which depict the transformation in women from one mental state into another, that they all contain images of movement: 'gehen,' 'kommen,' 'fassen,' 'hinausgestreut,' 'wachsend,' 'verwandelnd,' 'gleitend,' which suggest the rapidity and vibrance of the transformation, and also verbs which might be termed as being of a transparent, sensory nature, i.e., they convey an ethereal, invisible sensation: for example, 'flügelschlagend,' 'singen,' 'fliegen' - which convey the impression of the tremulous instantaneousness which seems to accompany each transformation. In each poem, one particular physical feature seems to stand out amidst all other detail, viz., the hand, ("Die Genesende"), the eyes, ("Die Erblindende"), and the face, ("Die Erwachsene"), and around these features a wealth of sensory association is accrued.

"Damen-Bildnis aus den achtziger Jahren"[10] is the portrayal of the romantic longing of a young girl only recently married, (her finger is 'neuberingt'), who also feels, like the woman in "Eine Welke," and the girl in "Die Erwachsene," that, in losing her girlhood, she has completely changed her identity, and that her former self has become a stranger to her. An atmosphere of bygone stylish elegance is created through images depicting all the trappings of comfortable, aristocratic prosperity, which lies so far from the everyday world of reality - 'Atlasdraperien,' 'Rüschen-Roben,' 'Schatullen,' the sentimental locket, which might be worn on the breast. The girl's homesickness after the marriage, and her desire that her life should become 'anders, wirklicher, wie in Romanen,' make her reminiscent of Fontane's character Effi Briest. She finds her new environment hostile towards her, and this is reflected in the inanimate objects which surround her, which seem to have a life of their own: the satin curtains, 'die ein Aufwand falscher Leidenschaften/ über ihr zu ballen schien;' the folds in her frilled gown, which seem to be listening to her every move. The image of her wanting to lay something in a jewel case, in order that it may lull her to sleep, 'im Geruch/von Erinnerungen,' is an example of synaesthesia, and the interwoven web of images in the poem has the capacity of appealing to the senses of sight, smell and hearing. There is irony in the fact that her notion of reality has a sickly, precious aura around it, conveyed through the images of writing in the diary, and the laying of a rose leaf in the locket. The image of the hand in the last stanza shows how the girl longs for some kind of gesture which would bring her into contact with the outside world. As will be seen, Rilke often uses the image of the hand to act as a means of showing how a person tries to reach out from the narrow bounds of his own self in an attempt to communicate with reality. The images of this poem, therefore, portray the inner feelings and the external gestures of its subject, and are woven into a fine web whereby the realm of the imagination and that of external reality are inextricably bound together.

The poem "Dame auf einem Balkon"[11] transforms what might be considered to be a common, almost everyday event into something ethereal and mysterious; a lady steps out from a room on to the balcony, and in the process, seems to be lifted from the earth into the skies. She steps outside, 'um auf das Gelände/noch ein wenig von sich fortzulegen' - perhaps to ease herself from some spiritual burden which has been troubling her. We can only surmise this, however, for once again, Rilke implies rather than specifically states.

The feeling that she has lost all heaviness, and is an airy, light figure is conveyed in the following images: she is 'in den Wind gehüllt;' she suddenly appears as if illuminated, into the lightness, ('licht in Lichtes'); she desires 'ganz licht zu sein;' she seems to have to been proffered up to the skies, and moves away from her earthly surroundings. She is not concretely described, but her external form is put before us through a startlingly unusual image - she is like a shining figure which stands out in relief on a cameo. She stands on the balcony against a dark background, which is bordered by the light from the room behind, which penetrates through the sides of the closed door. Thus in her dazzling brilliance she stands out as an unreal, ethereally transfigured creature. Notice, however, that there are no images, such as in the "Apollo" poems, which directly convey the intensity of her brilliance: this is done totally by implication, when the poet says: 'und du meinst der Abend war nicht, ehe/sie heraustrat' - i.e., before her appearance, it was as if the darkness of the evening had not existed: when she does appear, however, her brilliance seems to radiate out into the night, thereby throwing the darkness into relief.

Thus, with images of lightness, implied brilliance and darkness, the lady on the balcony becomes an incorporeal figure; we do not see her in her external form, but are made to experience and see that feeling of brilliant elatedness which she feels in her own mind. Here again, Rilke has taken what might be termed a common place event, and has penetrated beneath its surface, so as to give it an entirely new meaning.

The poem "Dame vor dem Spiegel"[12] also ostensibly concerns itself with a normal everyday occurrence, but once again it is imaginatively explored, and presented in a new light. The concretely imaginable situation of a lady looking at herself in the mirror is superimposed with the metaphor of the meticulous mixing of a drink and its consumption. The situation is thereby lifted from the realm of the naturalistically visible so that it becomes 'intuitively' visible. The ingredients of the drink are not concisely presented - the lady's 'tired comportment,' ('ermüdetes Gebaren'), her 'smile,' her 'hair.' From the order of these images, we sense that she possibly gazes into the mirror to regain self confidence: at first, she is tired, then, on becoming aware of her own presence, she smiles at herself. She then waits for a moment to become fully aware of her own image, then focuses her attention on her hair. She finally stands erect, raising up her shoulders from her evening dress. She becomes completely absorbed in herself, drinking in her image, yet never completely satisfied with what she sees. Like 'a lover in ecstasy,' she can hardly believe the reality of what she is experiencing:

> ...Sie trinkt
> was ein Liebender im Taumel tränke,
> prüfend, voller Misstraun;...

She is finally brought down to earth again when she becomes aware of the other objects in the room, and the dismal reality which she had momentarily left behind - all of which is reflected in the mirror.

The metaphor of the drink, therefore, is the visible equivalent for a whole series of inner occurrences. A similar process can be seen in the poem "Ein Frauen-Schicksal,"[13] where the destiny of a woman is likened to a glass out of which a king haphazardly chooses to drink, and which he then discards. In both these poems a consistently developed metaphor is superimposed upon a particular occurrence, so that it becomes visible on two levels, the metaphorical and the actual, which, in turn, become inextricably fused, so as to form one 'intuitive' image, i.e., it can only be imagined as a whole in our mind's eye, and is sensed, rather than directly seen.[14] The elusive is given a visible anchor, which has the capacity of bringing all hidden associations to the surface.

The two poems entitled "Der Gefangene"[15] intensely project the 'Befindlichkeit' of the state of captivity, this time, not as an objective portrayal by the poet, but through the words of the prisoner himself. As Brigitte Bradley points out,[16] the first poem presents the location of the prisoner's captivity, whilst the second concentrates solely on his inner thoughts and sensations concerning his captivity.

In the first poem it is shown that the prisoner has, like the subject of "Der Panther" which immediately follows the poem, lost all contact with the world around him. This is manifested through the image of the hand, which, unlike certain other poems of the Neue Gedichte[17] where it is used to convey the idea of reaching out from the inwardness of the mind in order to establish contact with the external environment, thereby seeking the inner unity of the self and the empirical reality around it, demonstrates rather the opposite, for here it repels, rather than beckons: 'Meine Hand hat nur noch eine Gebärde, mit der sie verscheucht.' In the loneliness of his cell, the prime emotion that the prisoner experiences is fear of the unknown, hence his need to repulse anything which is unfamiliar, coupled with the desire to experience something new within the confines of his narrow world and its deadening monotony. He has become as one with this inner world, which, in turn, is completely isolated from outward concrete reality. The central image of the poem is that of water dripping from the walls of the cell. This is the only external stimulus that activates the mind or the heart of the prisoner, but it does not provide a form of outward distraction for him, but rather completely overtakes and rules his thoughts:

> Ich höre nur dieses Klopfen
> und mein Herz hält Schritt
> mit dem Gehen der Tropfen
> und vergeht damit.

The outward features of the cell which are put before us - the stonework, out of which it is made, the dampness and darkness - mirror exactly the inner state of the prisoner's mind. The rhythms of the three stanzas subtly reflect the slow uneven trickling of the drops of water, which, in turn, mirrors his lethargic heartbeats. He has become as one with his surroundings. Once again, therefore, an elusive inner experience is conveyed to the reader in the form of a concrete, visible image. This image is built up not with a wealth of intricate detail, but by the projection of its most salient attributes, so that the experience which it mirrors is portrayed in its quintessence.

In the second poem of the cycle the prisoner describes by means of comparisons his own feelings regarding his state of captivity, thereby giving the reader a direct insight into the effects on a human being of such isolation. The space which surrounds him as well as his own physical and spiritual make-up become turned to stone. The future becomes stagnant and holds no hope; the past becomes meaningless and lacks coherence. His mouth, that which gives a human being the capacity to express his inward thoughts, can only rabidly grin, and God, that which embodies man's highest spiritual values, maliciously blocks up 'das letzte Loch' in the cell, which might have let in a glimmer of light. The worst torment of all is that in this nightmare of suspended animation, death would offer no immediate release: 'Und du lebtest doch.'

The main feature of the imagery of this poem is that cosmic conceptions such as space, 'das, was jetzt Himmel ist und Wind/Luft deinem Mund und deinem Auge Helle,' the future, 'was in dir morgen heisst und: dann/und: späterhin und nächstes Jahr und weiter' and the concept of God, 'Und das was Gott war, wäre nur dein Wächter' are reduced to concrete visible images, thereby limiting and even debasing their transcendental scope, so that the infinite becomes expressed through finite images. The future becomes 'wund in dir und voller Eiter/und schwäre nur und bräche nicht mehr an,' - an image of foul stagnation, with no hope of a cure -; space becomes stone, and God a filthy, malicious rogue. Through the tension of these opposites and the reduction of infinite to debased finite forms an atmosphere of stifling claustrophobia is induced which, in turn, evokes forcefully the 'Befindlichkeit' of the state of captivity. The actual figure of a trapped human being disappears entirely from the reader's mind - it is only the prisoner's sensations which take on a universal validity, that we are made to 'see' through concrete imagery and which form the final impression of the poem.

As can be interpreted by the title, the poem "Der Fremde"18 also concerns itself with an isolated individual and his personal fate. He has completely and deliberately absolved himself from all close contact with those around him and lives out his existence in pursuit of the most elemental experiences of life. He travels exclusively by night, the time when all possibilities of life seem to be mystically exposed to him, as if in a dream:

> Wunderbare hatte er durchwacht,
> die mit starken Sternen überzogen
> enge Fernen auseinanderbogen
> und sich wandelten wie eine Schlacht.

This translucent image is imbued with a strong epic quality, evoked by the 'starken Sternen' and 'enge Fernen,' which suggests that the traveller, in the vastness of the night, is being exposed to the infinity of the universe, which is never static. The images contained in the opening of the second stanza describe other 'Reisenächte' which the traveller has experienced:

> andere, die mit in den Mond gestreuten
> Dörfern, wie mit hingehaltenen Beuten,

> sich ergaben, oder durch geschonte
> Parke graue Edelsitze zeigten,

He does not have to search out the things of the earth, the villages, parks and noble country estates, but rather the moonlight, the unearthly powers of the universe illuminate and present them to him like 'hingehaltene Beuten.' This interwoven depiction of cosmic and earthly imagery seems to fuse together the two spheres, so that that which is of the earth is also seen to be part of the infinite. The stranger will never reach the end of his journey, for at every way and turn new experiences are waiting for him: 'Wege, Brücken, Länder...Städte, die man übertreibt.' The stranger is, in fact, a chiffre for Rilke's conception of the poet, for Rilke himself.[19] According to this, the poet must have the ability to experience all things in life, to be openly receptive to them, and yet in no way covet them, nor regard them as personal possessions - only when this is achieved, can the artist produce works which are devoid of the personality of their creator, and are as much a part of the universe as those things and emotions to which they refer and which they encompass. This the stranger realizes - he knows that although he would like to linger in and be a part of the world around him, he cannot, for it would limit his capacity to absorb all things from the spectrum of the universe if he were to identify himself closely with single aspects of it.

There is an eternal quality about Rilke's stranger, which is reminiscent of Ahasver, the eternal wanderer. The epic passing of time is conveyed in the poem by its flowing rhythms and the succession of isolated images - Dörfer, geschonte Parke, graue Edelsitze, Wege, Brücken, Länder - which seem to float past in an indeterminate way. In the last three lines of the poem, however, is contained an image which forms a surprising contrast to those which precede it:

> Doch auf fremden Plätzen war ihm eines
> täglich ausgetretnen Brunnensteines
> Mulde manchmal wie ein Eigentum.

The image of the fountain's overflowing trough is precisely particularized: it is a seemingly minute concrete detail which is put into focus before us, rather than something which is more vague and general, and which vividly stands out against the overall tone of the poem. Its purpose is to demonstrate that the stranger/poet is capable of experiencing the vastness of life in even the most inconspicuous objects - it is with these that he has the greatest affinity and is most tempted to make the error of possessing and calling them his own. However, although the detail is in itself minute, it represents many other entities, which have the same enticing effect on the traveller, because it does not merely exist on one particular location, but everywhere, that is, 'auf fremden Plätzen.' Thus, this one, seemingly unobtrusive image stands for a wealth of similar underlying associations.

The images of the poem as a whole form, therefore, a definite progression from stanza to stanza - from the vast and indeterminate, to the minute - all of which, however, have implications which are equally as wide in significance. We see here, yet again, how all things for Rilke, whether great or small, are capable of revealing the infinite.

In the poem "Der Einsame"[20] the subject, who can again be interpreted as representing the artist,[21] likens his heart to an inanimate object, a tower, and it is this image which dominates the following two stanzas and gives the imagery therein contained their perspective.

> Nein: ein Turm soll sein aus meinem Herzen
> und ich selbst an seinen Rand gestellt:
> wo sonst nichts mehr ist, noch einmal Schmerzen
> und Unsäglichkeit, noch einmal Welt.

Out of his own heart the poet will construct an impregnable ediface in which will be contained all the mysteries and pain of the outside world - that which the poet strives to be receptive to, to comprehend and portray through the medium of his art. He is placed not inside but outside of this tower, at its summit, which suggests, that although all of life is contained in his very being, he can observe it from an external and hence objective viewpoint. As H.F. Peters points out,[22] the image of the 'Turm' frequently occurs in Rilke's poetry to symbolize strength, solitude and watchfulness, an indestructible bastion which refuses to be weathered down by the hostile forces which surround it. In the poem "Der Turm"[23] the tower enables the poet to distance himself from the reality of the everyday world, thereby also enabling him to confront this reality objectively. A similar image of containing and restraining the dynamic powers of the mind within oneself is also to be found in the poem "Der Stifter"[24] where the subject attempts to kneel, a gesture of humble submission, in order:

> daß man die eigenen Konturen,
> die auswärtswollenden, ganz angespannt
> im Herzen hält, wie Pferde in der Hand.

This image suggests a powerful struggle to achieve the desired state, whereas the tower image conveys more the idea of stoic composure and resolution already gained. Both the images suggest the vital strength of willpower required in order to completely master the overpowering emotions of the mind. In "Aus dem Leben eines Heiligen"[25] the saint also goes through the same process of self-mastery:

> Sein Herz erlernte, langsam durchzugehen;
> er zog es gross wie einen Sohn.

- until he finally achieves the greatest possible equanimity of the soul:

> Und namenlose Nöte kannte er,
> finster und ohne Morgen wie Verschläge;
> und seine Seele gab er folgsam her,
> da sie erwachsen war...

The image of the heart symbolizes in these poems the centre of man's spiritual will - it is there that he experiences all emotion, it is the place which determines his reactions to the 'things' of the outside world, and as such, is the ruling force of his mind.

In the image of the tower as displayed in "Der Einsame" therefore, an inward emotion, a feeling of firm resolution, is put before us as something visible and concrete. In the ensuing stanzas, the mind of the poet is described from its newly gained vantage point, which is reminiscent of that contained in the later poem "Ausgesetzt auf den Bergen des Herzens"[26] where the poet is also in a position to observe the reality of himself and of the world around him from a higher, objective plane. The tower exists alone in the immensity of the cosmos like all of Rilke's 'Dinge,' where it becomes illuminated and darkened with the turning of day into night, as time unceasingly flows. The poet's heart is like a face which is essentially static, projected out into that which continually moves. It is 'ein äusserstes Gesicht aus Stein' - 'utmost' because it is impermeable in its hardness and because it will have reached the ultimate stage in its endeavour to achieve permanence. In the final stanza the eternal paradox of the poetic existence is revealed, which T.S. Eliot summed up in the following way: "The progress of an artist is a continual self sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality,"[27] an idea echoed by Rilke in the poem "Der Dichter"[28] and which forms the basis of his conception of the artist -

> Alle Dinge, an die ich mich gebe,
> werden reich und geben mich aus.

The poet is doomed to isolation, not only from the outside world but also from himself, for in the creative process he expends the resources of his very being to such a degree, that he becomes impersonal to it. It becomes filled and ultimately consumed by the world around it, which results finally in the extinguishing of the poet's individual personality. The lonely void which surrounds him will finally annihilate him - the outward face, 'willig seinen inneren Gewichten,' governed by the inwardness of the mind, and expressing this, becomes destroyed by the 'wide spaces,' ('die Weiten'), which nevertheless force it to achieve ultimate happiness, because this for the poet is the highest form of self-realisation - complete abandonment of the personality and absolute devotion to art.

"Der Einsame" contains therefore only one central concrete image, which acts as the visible equivalent for that which is essentially an abstract emotion. All other images are of a translucent, ethereal nature - 'ein Ding allein im Übergrossen,' 'ein letztes, sehendes Gesicht,' 'das Nie-zu-Stillende,' 'die Weiten' - which produce here the feeling of vastness and emptiness. Thus the mind of the single figure of the solitary takes on epic proportions, so that the final effect is not that the reader is being made aware of the state of mind of only one individual, but that he is being made to apprehend a universal state of mind which exists within the general spectrum of human emotions. This is indeed the case also with the two preceding poems discussed, which only ostensibly deal with individual male figures - they could just as well be entitled "Gefangenschaft," "Fremdheit," "Einsamkeit," for they all convey individual existential states of mind, which are not merely peculiar to certain individual personalities. The same could be said of several other poems of the Neue Gedichte, which only deal on the surface with individual human types, and which contain no definite personal characteristics of the subjects, for example, "Ein Frauenschicksal," "Die Liebende," "Das Kind."

Several of the Neue Gedichte have as their subjects groups of people, most of whom Rilke observed in the streets of Paris. A remarkable feature of certain of these poems is that the figure groups are portrayed as if they were single individuals, that is, the individual members all share the same physical gestures and attitudes and all move in unison, so that no single figures are individualized. The final effect for the reader is that he is observing one, unified entity, which consists of many parts.

The two poems "Die Bettler"[29] and "Fremde Familie,"[30] are depictions of isolated scenes; once again, the images do not serve to offer a naturalistic depiction of the subjects or their actions, but rather salient descriptive details are highlighted, and by focusing attention normally on only one outstanding 'Gebärde,' the poet succeeds in giving these subjects a strangely static quality, which makes them appear like petrified statues.

In "Die Bettler," the subjects are not clearly outlined, but are presented as an amorphous mass of an indeterminate nature, which a 'stranger' presumes to comprise a group of beggars:

Du wusstest nicht, was den Haufen
ausmacht. Ein Fremder fand
Bettler darin.

The effect of this image is to distance the reader from the subject - he is made to observe something which is essentially enigmatic and which does not seem to fit into any logical context. Immediately after this, however, our attention is directly focused on to three physical features of these strange people - their hands, their mouths and eyes, and it is through these images that their whole being seems to be projected. The fact that they are inwardly hollow and that materially they possess nothing is reflected in the gesture they make with their cupped hands - 'Sie verkaufen/ das Hohle aus ihrer Hand.' Their mouths are 'voll Mist' - a repulsive Baudelairean image, suggesting foul inner decay. Despite their extreme repugnance, however, the poet is irresistibly attracted and 'seduced' by them:

Es zergeht in ihren zerrührten
Augen sein fremdes Gesicht;

The beggars' eyes, the mirrors of their souls, as it were, exercise a fatal hypnotic fascination over the poet, and demonstrate his complete absorption into the very being of his subjects, as if there exists, despite their obvious differences, a kind of mystical affinity between them. This type of kinship is not only restricted to his human subjects - a similar image of the overwhelming attracting power of the eyes of animals is to be seen in such poems as "Schlangen -

Beschwörung" and "Schwarze Katze," where the observer is uncontrollably drawn into the creatures, so that it is as if they are a part of him, and vice-versa.

In "Die Bettler," therefore, the sequence of images, beginning with a distanced, generalized view, and concluding with the depiction of one individualized detail, produces an effect similar to that of the focusing of the human eye when it views an object from a distance and then approaches it until it is in its immediate proximity. The final image of the poem, however, where the beggars are collectively mocking and spitting at the observer, distances the reader from the subject once again, thereby changing once more the perspective in which he sees it.

In the poem "Fremde Familie" Rilke attempts to concretely convey the appearance of an 'unusual family' of four people, which seems to effect him in some mysterious way. There are almost no external features of the group given: they appear suddenly ('sich bilden') on the street, and in the final stanza a voice and a hand are mentioned, but even these do not seem to be an integral part of the group, but just appear arbitrarily from within its midst, and act independently.

> Denn eine Stimme, wie vom vorigen Jahr,
> sang dich zwar an und blieb doch ein Geweine;
> und eine Hand, die wie geliehen war,
> kam zwar hervor und nahm doch nicht die deine.

The central image of the poem which is used to directly portray the appearance of the family is the simile contained in the first stanza, which is not, as one might have expected, organic in nature, but neuter:

> So wie der Staub, der irgendwie beginnt
> und nirgends ist, zu unerklärtem Zwecke
> an einem leeren Morgen in der Ecke
> in die man sieht, ganz rasch zu Grau gerinnt,
> so bildeten sie sich, wer weiss aus was,

The image of the dust is the visible equivalent for the mysterious appearance of the family. By using an inorganic image in this way to describe that which is essentially organic, Rilke unites here two planes of reality in which the inanimate complements the animate. In this way, the two halves of the comparison, that is, the central object and that with which it is compared have an equal valency: they would appear in normal context to be completely independent of each other, yet in the context of Rilke's poem they are inextricably fused. This is a frequent technique used in the Neue Gedichte, which results in a profusion of striking and unusual imagery, which strives at producing the exact nuance of the objects portrayed. Thus in "Fremde Familie" the unusual image of the swirling dust conveys precisely the enigmatically indeterminate nature of the appearance of the group of figures - the dust begins 'irgendwie' and is 'nirgends' and settles itself down 'zu unerklärtem Zwecke/an einem leeren Morgen in der Ecke;' the family, like the dust, is formed 'wer weiss aus was' and were 'etwas Ungewisses mitten/im nassen Niederschlag der Gasse.' The image of the dust is therefore the visible equivalent of 'etwas Ungewisses,' which in a strange way seems to irresistibly entice the poet - 'das...nach dir verlangte. Oder nicht nach dir.'

As Wolfgang Müller points out,[31] Rilke employs many abstract nouns in his poetic technique when wishing to express that which is strange and intangible - thus the 'fremde Familie' is seen as 'etwas Ungewisses;' the product of the alchemist's labours in "Der Alchimist"[32] is termed 'Das Ungeheuere;' the experiences of the young girl in "Die Erwachsene"[33] are portrayed as 'das Fliegende, Entfliehende, Entfernte/das Ungeheuere, noch Unerlernte.' Examples of this type, where adjectives are used as substantives abound in the Neue Gedichte;[34] they lend to certain abstract connotations a definite tactile concreteness, as if they were actual living forces. As images however, where they are not accompanied by visible equivalents, (as in "Die Erwachsene," for example) which often occur within the context of a simile, they are not readily visible to the mind's eye, and so in many of the poems where they are contained, there frequently exists a remarkable blend of concrete and abstract imagery, which often gives the overall impression that a poem moves on two planes, the inner and outward, the realm of the mind and the empirical world of external 'things.'

The poems discussed in this section may be taken to be widely representative of other of the Neue Gedichte which deal with human figures. The titles, such as "Die Greisin," "Der Gefangene," etc., would seem to suggest that such poems would be visual portraits of the subjects concerned, but as we have seen, this is not the case, for the poet does not concentrate on them as individual personalities, but rather attempts to formalize the inner sensations they experience. The figures are all essentially static and as motionless as statues. They appear to exist within a context of their own, as if separated by dense dividing walls from the everyday reality which inevitably must surround them. Indeed, the quality which they all share is isolation. But what is the nature of this isolation? It is the sort which occurs when the individual is locked within the confines of his own thought, where he is determining to fix his position in the palpable world around him. This explains the nature of the imagery contained in these poems, which, without exception, is comprised of interwoven patterns of emotional, intuitive and concretely visible images, whereby the elusive inner workings of the mind are related to the 'things' of the empirical world and fused, which gives them an aura of absolute validity.

The isolation of the individual figures, whilst occasionally sought after by them, often is not: the gesture of the beckoning hand, or the resolute face, which are the outward expressions for the yearning of the soul, symbolize the attempt of the individual to make contact with the seemingly incomprehensible infinity in which he exists - more often than not, it is not revealed if he is successful. There is a constant striving on the part of the poet to express this infinity in finite terms, so that if the poetic figures themselves do not comprehend it, then the reader, from his objective standpoint, would be in a better position to, for the poet enables him to 'see' it.

CHAPTER V: THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE IMAGERY IN THE MYTHOLOGICAL, BIBLICAL AND HUMAN-FIGURE POEMS

C. Day Lewis states in his book The Poetic Image "...the image is the constant in all poetry, and every poem is itself an image."[1] The poems dealt with in this study have the one feature in common that they all have as their subjects human or human-like, namely mythological figures. In this final chapter, these images, for that is what these poems are, namely studies of certain aspects of individual figures, and in some cases mythological events, which are moulded by the poet into single composite images, will be examined as a whole in order to ascertain if they are thematically related and united by common bonds of meaning. This having been done, we shall attempt to crystallize and define the nature and function of the single images within the poems that have already been interpreted in preceding chapters and determine the position and significance of the human figure poems in relationship to the other works of the Neue Gedichte which centre around inanimate or non-human subjects.

The common quality of all the human figures in the Neue Gedichte is isolation. In every poem a figure becomes observed not within the context of an interwoven web of external relationships, but normally totally alone, locked within the confines of its own spiritual state. It is the essence of these inner spiritual states, of the meaning underlying external phenomena which is presented in these poems - the nature of these can be brought to the surface by a comprehensive survey of the poems already discussed.

Rilke presents certain figures which are representative of pure, untainted being, and as such are worthy of emulation by the rest of mankind. The god Apollo is an example of such a being;[2] his existence is characterized by perfect equanimity of the soul, which contains dynamic, life-giving energy. In the two poems in which he is portrayed, it is shown that he does not force with deliberation his powers into the world, but rather it shines through his very being, and can be received only by those who themselves would be spiritually prepared for them. Apollo exists as an example of 'reines Dasein,' in and for himself, personally unconcerned with human activity, above which he is elevated. It is as if he has no personality endowed with what could be termed human attributes, but merely personifies an ultimate state of pure being, made manifest through him in the forms of overpowering brilliance and pristine clarity and freshness. Other such beings which represent 'reines Dasein' would be Venus and Artemis who personify the pure states of beauty and clarity. These mythological gods move on a higher plane than that of the human: they are completely closed in upon themselves and exist only for their own sake.

Another group of human-figure poems concerns itself with the relationship, usually the spiritual and erotic love of two people, whereby one of the partners wishes to transcend the bounds of his inner self and form a perfect union with the other. In "Abisag" the union between the young girl and the old king can never take place; the two people are too locked within the confines of their own selves to be capable of reaching out and being receptive to each other's spirituality, although it is clear that they both long to escape themselves to form a synthesis with some other being. Between them, however, lies an infinity which can never be bridged.

Many of Rilke's human figures are the victims of the all consuming power of the love of another, who is nearly always shown as being either stoically aloof from the earnest demands of the supplicant or as regarding him or her as a threat, an encroachment on the sublime sanctity of the self, which must be preserved at all costs. Eranna's whole being has been totally depleted by Sappho's all embracing love, which the poetess uses, not for her own personal fulfilment but as the fundament, the essence of her poetry. As a result, Eranna has been completely spiritually overtaken, and no longer possesses an individual personality. Sappho, on the other hand, refuses the love of the man Alkaïos, for this would involve giving herself completely to a natural human relationship, when that which she really requires is the idea of pure love, where the absolute surrender of the self would be impossible. The poem "Esther" also shows how the being of one person becomes totally engulfed by that of another, although this time, not through the power of love.

David, in his song to King Saul and in his lament for Jonathan, shows how he too has been utterly spiritually consumed by another: he demands in seductive and violent terms that his own being be united with that of his partner, so that a harmonious synthesis be achieved, in which his very self would find ultimate fulfilment. A similar relationship in which the self of one person is completely given to another only to be taken up and used and then rejected is to be seen in a number of the prophet poems and in certain of those where Christ is the main figure, where the prophet gives utterance to his despair or anger at having been forsaken by God - by Him who had completely filled them with His presence and had used them as His mouthpiece. Only Joshua succeeds in preserving to the last his individual self, and, in fact, asserts it against God, ultimately achieving a perfect synthesis with Him.

Many of Rilke's figures express a desire to reach outside the confines of their own individual self, in an attempt to become a part of the outside world and to establish an identity with it. The faded old woman in "Eine Welke" sees the possibility of escaping her present state by regaining the identity of her former self as a girl - something which is now impossible; the elegant young lady in "Damenbildnis aus den Achtziger Jahren" wishes to find refuge and assert herself in a romantic fantasy-world; the abject and forlorn, such as the beggars and the strange family[3] see nothing positive and concrete outside themselves, only confusion - they live within the confines of their own minds, reaching out with their hands into the intangible world around them, searching for something with which they could make definite contact, and with which they could identify themselves, in order to give their existence a meaning.

In complete contrast to the above mentioned groups of figures, whose lives are primarily tempered by varying degrees of 'Sehnsucht' and 'Angst,' are those who completely absorb themselves, even if only momentarily, within the bounds of their own selves; they make no attempt to reach out from within themselves into the outside world, in order to complete their being, but have already come to terms with themselves within themselves, that is to say, their own self has become their world. That which lies outside it and would normally be considered to be the empirical world, does not really lie outside it at all, but is contained within, so that the self and the world are ultimately united: the 'Innerlichkeit' of the self becomes fused with the 'Äusserlichkeit' of the world, which finally results within the individual in a spiritual equilibrium, in which state the highest form of self knowledge is achieved.

In the poem "Dame vor dem Spiegel" the recognition and assertion of the self is only momentarily achieved when the lady becomes immersed in her own image in the mirror - she becomes released from the outside world and finds pleasure and harmony, albeit short-lived, from the world contained within her. The three poems "Die Genesende," "Die Erwachsene" and "Die Erblindende" show how three individuals undergo an inner spiritual change, in which a new identity is found within the inner world of the self. For the prisoner, however, total immersion in the self leads to an ultimate state of stagnation, for the world which surrounds him, the enclosed prison cell, contains nothing of the positive wealth of experience of the real outside world which his being can assimilate. Such figures as the stranger and the solitary totally withdraw into the confines of the self, which nevertheless is openly receptive to the things of the empirical world, for it is there that the most perfect equilibrium of the inner and outer forces of the universe can be maintained. This state of inwardness which produces ultimate self-knowledge and assurance in a seemingly hostile world reaches its most sublime form in the figures of Euridike and Alkestis, who come to the realization that death is really another stage not merely in the progress of earthly life, but of ultimate being, and that human existence is really but one of its many facets.

In the poems of the Neue Gedichte which contain mythological and human figures therefore, the central motif is that of the relationship of the self to the influences which surround it. Certain of the figures are completely overtaken by some external force and as a result become inwardly emptied and broken. Others long to fulfil themselves by reaching outside into the external world in order to banish their inner emptiness. In contrast to these images of inner dissolution are those figures who accept the empirical world in its entirety and absorb it into their very being, so that the two spheres become fused, at which time a state of ultimate harmony is achieved whereby the self, the individual personality of the individual concerned becomes an integral part of the world of things which surrounds it. All the figures, however, are isolated - some seeing the necessity of this, for reasons already outlined, others, because it is forced upon them out of no desire of their own.

Not one of the figures, as we have seen, is individualized into a well rounded personality with exclusively personal characteristics, but rather the very essence of their spiritual states is projected outwards, frequently by means of an interior apprehension of the external gesture, or by the expression of such features as the mouth or the movement of the eyes. It is a notable feature of Rilke's human figures therefore, that only inwardly but never outwardly are they presented in their entirety.

At this point it shall be attempted to define as precisely as possible the way in which Rilke achieves this effect through his imagery by synthesizing and enlarging upon that which we have already observed in the preceding chapters of this study. In order to accomplish this effectively the structure of the poems, that is, the framework in which the images are contained will have to be examined.

In his Rodin essay Rilke wrote of the plastic work of art, "Wie gross auch die Bewegung eines Bildwerks sein mag, sie muss, und sei es aus unendlichen Weiten, sei es aus der Tiefe des Himmels, sie muss zu ihm zurückkehren, der grosse Kreis muss sich schliessen, der Kreis der Einsamkeit, in der ein Kunst-Ding seine Tage verbringt....was die Dinge auszeichnet, dieses Ganz-mit-sich-Beschäftigt-sein, das war es, was einer Plastik ihre Ruhe gab; sie durfte nichts von aussen verlangen oder erwarten, sich auf nichts beziehen, was draussen lag, nichts sehen, was nicht in ihr war. Ihre Umgebung musste in ihr liegen."[4]

It is this technique of the 'geschlossene Form' that Rilke employs in all of his Neue Gedichte, and is summed up effectively by L. McGlashan in the following way: "Characteristic of the Neue Gedichte...is a pattern obtained by taking an object out of all relationship with anything else. It is an immanent pattern of 'things' in the world divorced from connections with the beholder. The object is seen in itself, by itself; the lines which would lead beyond its contours and put it in a perspective created by surrounding objects are deliberately excluded."[5] Although McGlashan is speaking here primarily of those poems in the collection which are objective studies of one particular figure, such as "Der Einsame" or "Früher Apollo," the same holds true for those poems which portray an epic event, such as "Geburt der Venus" or "Orpheus. Euridike. Hermes," an historical or biblical event, or where the subject of the poem speaks in the first person, such as "Der Gefangene." What Rilke is concerned with achieving in all these poems is to present the very essence of a particular event or emotion in its entirety. The reader's attention is focused directly on to the subject in hand and all extraneous associations such as the building up of atmosphere around the subject with decorative ornamentation, or the placing of the subject within a temporal context are omitted. The result of this preoccupation with the intense-viewing of one central aspect of a figure is a compressed condensation of language and form - indeed, one of the characteristic features of the style of the Neue Gedichte is that many of the poems are regular sonnets or have a sonnet-like structure,[6] a poetic form that most readily lends itself to the use of condensed language for the expression of concentrated thought processes with a high degree of objectivity. Even in the poems such as "Geburt der Venus" a concentration of thought and language is to be observed: as H.W. Belmore points out, "These poems vibrate with a peculiar tension produced by the contrast between the easy flow and comparative looseness of the blank verse and the compact density of Rilke's mature style, with its interplay of personal syntax, similes, sound effects and enjambement, a density matched only by the similar fulness in G.M. Hopkins' poems."[7]

The density of form and language of the poems of the Neue Gedichte and Rilke's underlying theoretical concepts of them must then of necessity effect the very nature and function of their imagery, for imagery is the core of a poem, that is to say, it is the expression of the central thought content of a work. As C.Day Lewis states, "...the principle that organizes the images is a concord of image and theme, the images lighting the way for the theme and helping to reveal it, step by step, to the writer, the theme as it thus grows up controlling more and more the deployment of other images."[8] In Rilke's own words the plastic work of art does not require nor expect anything which lies outside it; it does not refer to anything which is not contained within it; its environment, that is, that which surrounds it and has a direct effect on its internal make-up, on those characteristics which make it an individual entity and unique from all others, must be seen to actually be a part of its internal make-up. In the poems of the Neue Gedichte therefore, where these principles are applied for the first time in Rilke's poetry, the imagery in the individual poems does not serve to provide a great richness of multifarious associations, as L. McGlashan correctly points out,[9] but rather concentrates one one particular aspect or quality inherent in the subject concerned, which is projected out into the foreground and intensified. Selected examples will serve to illustrate this point.

As was shown above, one group of human figure poems has as its theme the relationship between two people, whereby the individuality of one partner has been completely overtaken by the being of the other, or else is greatly in danger of becoming so. The prime emotions experienced by the lover are those of confusion and inner hollowness. In the poem "Eranna an Sappho" the images are all concerned with projecting Eranna's feeling of having been totally exploited spiritually and of having been cast away from her former self. Sappho is described as 'Du wilde weite Werferin' and Eranna as the spear which she throws; the other central images of the poem then consistently continue this analogy by conveying the movement of the weapon as it is picked up and then hurled into space: 'Dein Erklingen/warf mich weit,' 'Mich kann keiner wiederbringen,' 'ich allein bin fortgegeben.' This effect is also continued in the ensuing poem "Sappho an Eranna" - 'Schwingen will ich dich, umrankter Stab,' 'Wie das Sterben will ich durchdringen/und dich weitergeben wie das Grab.'

This imagery of confusion, fear and trepidation also forms the fabric of the other poems belonging to this group, for example: "David singt vor Saul" - 'König, hörst du, wie mein Saitenspiel/Fernen wirft, durch die wir uns bewegen:/ Sterne treiben uns verwirrt entgegen/und wir fallen endlich wie ein Regen.' 'Daß mein Klang dir alles wiederbrächte./Aber trunken taumelt mein Getön.' 'König, der du alles dieses hattest/und der du mit lauter Leben mich/überwältigtest und überschattest'/komm aus deinem Throne und zerbrich/meine Harfe, die du so ermattest,' 'Mein verwaistes Herz und dein verworrnes.' "Abisag" - 'und alles was die Nacht war, kam und scharte/mit Bangen und Verlangen sich um sie,' 'Die Sterne zitterten wie ihresgleichen,' 'Sein wirres Leben lag/verlassen wie verrufne Meeresküste.'

This phenomenon has already been frequently observed within the body of this study: in both the Apollo poems, for example, the images all centre around the attributes of brightness, freshness and underlying dynamism ('morgen,' 'Frühling,' 'kein Schatten,' 'hintreiben,' 'des Mundes Beben,' 'sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber,' 'blenden,' 'flimmern'). In "Kretische Artemis" the images are intended to produce an ethereal, gossamer-like vision under which there is also latent dynamic power ('Wind der Vorgebirge: war nicht ihre/Stirne wie ein lichter Gegenstand?' 'Glatter Gegenwind der leichten Tiere,' 'ein wechselvolles Vorgefühl,' 'stürmte,' 'erzürnt bezwungen').

In the poems concerning the figure of the Old Testament prophet, the imagery powerfully conveys the torment of the inner dissolution which these figures experience, for example: "Tröstung des Elia" - 'sein weitgeschleudertes Vertrauen,' 'zerhauen,' 'am Bache schlachtend bis ans Abendgrauen,' 'so lange bis er unterm Ginsterstrauche/wie weggeworfen aufbrach in Geschrei/das in der Wüste brüllte,' 'Sich-Zerspalten der Erde.' "Saul unter den Propheten" - 'Erst da ihn der Geist auf solchen Wegen/überfiel und auseinanderriss,' 'und sein Blut ging in der Finsternis,' 'und nun war er nichts als dieser Haufen/umgestürzter Würden, Last auf Last.' "Jeremia" - 'du hast vermocht/mir das hingehaltene Herz zu reizen/daß es jetzt wie eines Löwen kocht,' 'nun blutet/aus ihm Unglücksjahr um Unglücksjahr,' 'zerstossen,' 'zerstören,' 'Trümmerhaufen.' This technique of the consistent augmentation and intensification of a central theme with images which all circle around aspects of the same emotion is also to be seen in such poems as "Der Einsame" and "Der Gefangene," in which one metaphor, in these cases a tower and a prison cell, is superimposed over all the other images in the poem, thereby directly fixing the perspective from which the central object is to be viewed.

In order to illustrate and enhance the central theme of a poem Rilke makes great use of metaphors which are characterized by their compact and precise redolence. They define in tangible, forceful terms inner occurrences and states in such a way that they become almost palpably visible. The following examples will serve to illustrate this feature:

Lass mich nicht mehr bei der Harfe schlafen;
sieh dir diese Knabenhand da an:
glaubst du König, daß sie die Oktaven
eines Leibes noch nicht greifen kann?
("David singt vor Saul")

Und was jetzt in dir morgen heisst und: dann
und: späterhin und nächstes Jahr und weiter-
das würde wund in dir und voller Eiter
und schwäre nur und bräche nicht mehr an:
("Der Gefangene")

Venedigs Sonne wird in meinem Haar
ein Gold bereiten: aller Alchemie
erlauchten Ausgang.
("Die Kurtisane")

Die Dienerinnen kämmten sieben Tage
die Asche ihres Grams und ihrer Plage
Neige und Niederschlag aus ihrem Haar,
("Esther")

und sie sank ans Kreuz in dem Kostüme
eines Schmerzes, welches ganz besetzt
war mit ihrer Liebe grössten Steine.
("Der Auferstandene")

Sie verkaufen
das Hohle aus ihrer Hand.
("Die Bettler")

One of the most important devices used in the imagery of the Neue Gedichte is the simile, examples of which are to be found in practically every piece in the collection. Again, they are not used for ornamentation but to define as precisely as possible that to which they refer, although they often encompass wide areas of experience and are startling in their unusualness.

Wolfgang Müller demonstrates that the simile was of great importance to Rilke at the time he was writing the Neue Gedichte for the approach one should take in understanding the nature of 'things.'[10] In a letter to Clara Rilke of July 6th, 1906 Rilke explains how difficult it is to precisely remember the impression one gains from viewing paintings in galleries:

> Und diese Freude an solchen grossen Dingen geht so ganz in Nuancen vor sich, daß man später sagen kann, sie war so oder so gefärbt. Und man weiss fast nichts von ihr, wenn man nicht ein paar Anmerkungen hat, aus dem Momentanen heraus, die helfen könnten. So geht es mir auch mit dem Bildnis aus dem letzten Jahre in Berlin. Es müsste einem vor solchen Dingen ein Vergleich kommen, der wie ein kleiner eigener Eingang ist, durch den man immer wieder hinein kann.[11]

From this it can be ascertained that for Rilke the pregnant simile is a vehicle with which the essence of an object can readily be called to mind; it is something which opens the doors, as it were, of an object and which leads to its centre. In this way the phenomenon, no matter how vague or elusive, which is the subject of a comparison is given an emotive sensory anchor which reflects precisely its essential nature or an aspect thereof. As has been stated, the poems of the Neue Gedichte reveal the inner sides of their subjects rather than presenting a clearly defined external image. The majority of the similes they contain do not present concrete features in analogy with other external things, but frequently portray abstract attitudes of mind or sensations in analogy with concrete things. The following examples will serve to elucidate this point:

Wenn wir uns nur auseinanderhalten
du am Jungen, König, ich am Alten,
sind wir fast wie ein Gestirn das kreist.
("David singt vor Saul")

Das alles stand auf ihr und war die Welt
und stand auf ihr mit allem, Angst und Gnade,
wie Bäume stehen, wachsend und gerade,
("Die Erwachsene")

Sie war schon aufgelöst wie langes Haar
und hingegeben wie gefallner Regen
und ausgeteilt wie hundertfacher Vorrat.
("Orpheus. Euridike. Hermes.")

sie füllte sich ganz rasch mit seiner Miene
wie ein Gefäss und war schon voll genug
und floss schon über von des Königs Macht,
("Esther")

denn da und da, an meinen scheusten Orten
bist du mir ausgerissen wie das Haar,
das in den Achselhöhlen wächst und dorten,
wo ich ein Spiel für Frauen war,

bevor du meine dort verfitzten Sinne
aufsträhntest wie man einen Knaul entflicht;
("Klage um Jonathan")

In these examples inner occurrences, attitudes, states of mind are brought to the surface in palpable concrete form which reflects them with great depth and fine precision. Many of these similes in which the essence of an object is brought to the surface through analogy to a concrete thing actually appear at the beginning of a poem, in which case the central object appears after that to which it is analogous, so that the two halves of the comparison seem to have equal weight, whereby the affinities of the one are consistently and forcefully complemented by those of the other. Examples of this type are to be seen in "Dame vor dem Spiegel" and "Fremde Familie" in which the comparative image is as long or longer than that to which it is compared. The effect of such imagery whereby inner abstract emotions are expressed in concretely palpable terms is that it outwardly manifests, almost visibly, inner occurrences.

A number of the similes Rilke uses to describe inner states are purely abstract in nature, that is to say, no visible palpable object is used in the analogy, for example:

> Wie ein Singen kommt und geht in Gassen
> und sich nähert und sich wieder scheut,
> flügelschlagend, manchmal fast zu fassen
> und dann wieder weit hinausgestreut:
> spielt mit der Genesenden das Leben;
> ("Die Genesende")
>
> Und ihr Gestorbensein
> erfüllte sie wie Fülle.
> ("Orpheus. Euridike. Hermes.")
>
> ich zittere wie eine Bitte.
> ("Eranna an Sappho")

Images of this type allow of a purely intuitive apprehension, but nevertheless it is a remarkable feature that the sensations used for analogy with the abstract conceptions, (in these instances 'life,' 'the state of being dead,' tremulous apprehension), although outwardly invisible, nevertheless convey a certain palpable tactility, because these sensations are expressed through nouns, that is, concrete things (i.e., 'ein Singen,' 'Fülle,' 'eine Bitte'). In this way abstract analogues can be sensed as being corporeal forces which in turn often lend this same material quality to that with which they are analogous.

In addition to those similes above explained which contain at least one abstract element in the analogy Rilke is also extremely adept at using purely concrete similes to precisely delineate and define aspects of an object, for example:

> So wie der Strom am Ausgang seine Dämme
> durchbricht mit seiner Mündung Übermass,
> so brach nun durch die Ältesten der Stämme
> zum letzten Mal die Stimme Josuas.
> ("Josuas Landtag")
>
> während jetzt die Stube wie geschliffen
> hinter ihr die Türe füllt
> dunkel wie der Grund einer Kamee,
> die ein Schimmern durchlässt durch die Ränder;
> ("Dame auf einem Balkon")

This type of concrete simile still, however, has the power to evoke an abstract emotive sensation; in the two examples listed above these would be dynamic strength and shimmering translucence. In turn, such similes reflect the essential nature or mood of the subject concerned.

As well as using similes in which the two halves of the comparison are either concrete or abstract, Rilke also uses similes in which one or both elements completely cut across the abstract and the concrete and seem to contain features of them both; the images contained in such similes also convey definite palpable sensations and are imbued with the tensions of latent dynamism, for example:

> Vielleicht war dieses alles: so zu knien
> (so wie es alles ist was wir erfuhren):
> zu knien: daß man die eigenen Konturen,
> die auswärtswollenden, ganz angespannt
> im Herzen hält, wie Pferde in der Hand.
> ("Der Stifter")

> So zog er auch den Herren
> voran wie ein Stern dem Jahr.
> ("Absaloms Abfall")

In the poems dealing with mythological and human figures therefore, as well as in all the other poems of the Neue Gedichte which have inanimate objects, flowers and animals as their subjects, there is a predominance of figurative language in the form of metaphor and simile, the latter being the greater in number. As has been pointed out, the essential quality of these is their precision - they strive to convey with minute accuracy the quintessence of a particular attribute or attributes of the subject to which they refer. They frequently demonstrate within the framework of a poem a relative independence - often a poem will begin with a simile which at first will not appear to have immediate relevance with the subject concerned; usually they are quite drawn out and do not offer an analogy to merely one isolated aspect of the subject, but to several related aspects. Frequently, also, such fully developed similes will appear within the body of a poem and surprise in their unusualness. Often the similes which appear at the beginning of a poem develop into metaphors which then temper the perspective from which the whole poem is to be viewed.

The figurative language, the analogies and the many spheres of experience they encompass within the individual poem, no matter how diffuse they might seem at first glance, are all united by one common bond - the subject of the poem. This becomes surrounded by the associations it embodies. The imagery of these poems does not lead outwards and digress but converges on to one central axis. Externally, as it were, the subjects are hardly described - only actions are mentioned, the 'Gebärde,' or features such as eyes, the head, arms, hands, the mouth. These are never preceded by descriptive adjectives, but are normally only described by simile and metaphor, that is, in analogy to various realms of experience. In this way the metaphorical is projected outwards over the literal, so that it predominates: the subjects and their actions are not directly seen - it is mainly the associations they evoke in the mind of the poet that are forcefully brought to the surface. It is this process which results in an interior apprehension of the subjects concerned; it is the function of the imagery therefore to externalize and make vivid that which by the poet is regarded as their essence, their inner state. The individual poem consists of a finely interwoven web of external detail into which is integrated a metaphorical layer embodying the hidden associations which the subject contains. In this way a firmly moulded interrelationship of concrete and abstract elements arises in which there is a continual interplay of external and internal elements which fuse and form a composite image; the individual images have a contrapuntal effect in that they illuminate and intensify each other, so that the subject of the poem, although frequently viewed from several aspects, always remains at the poem's centre.

As has been stated, it was Rilke's aim in composing the Neue Gedichte to strive after the most exact visible and sensuous equivalents for experiences, no matter how elusive, that he had apperceived. It is this striving for the unequivocal reproduction of sensory experiences so that they may be firmly perceived in palpable form leaving no room for imprecision, which is the hallmark of the imagery of these poems.

In speaking of the way in which Rilke presents abstract spiritual concepts in his late poetry, Werner Günther writes: "Das Geistige erscheint...in fast oft unheimlicher Annäherung als sinnlich Fühlbares, Sichtbares, Hörbares, Schmeckbares, Betastbares, Riechbares. Das mit der fünffingerigen Hand der Sinne Erfasste hinwieder wird zurückverwandelt in Geistiges. Die Dichtung bewegt sich so in einem Erlebnisraum, in dem das Aussen und Innen, Konkretes und Abstraktes, Dinghaftes und Persönliches beständig ineinander übergehen. Die Sprache spiegelt diesen Raum."[13] This process of making that which is spiritual and abstract, concrete and palpable, almost visible, has been clearly demonstrated as being inherent in Rilke's poetic technique in the Neue Gedichte; the 'Raum' which Günther refers to here is that which is contained within the human mind - it encompasses all the realities of the human imagination; it is 'Innenraum.' The imagery of Rilke's human-figure poems strives to express this sphere outwardly and by using the external things of the empirical world in analogy to that which comprises the 'Innenraum' of his human subjects, it is as if there exists a fundamental unity between them: it is as if the human figures, although spiritually isolated are nevertheless an inherent part of the universe which surrounds them and which even appears to be contained within them. Although they appear in the poems to be static, they are nevertheless animated by the external forces of the empirical world with which they are compared and which they seem to contain.

In explaining the poetic processes involved in the writing of the *Neue Gedichte*, Rilke wrote to an acquaintance:

> Connaissant ces quelques goûts de ma vie nomade, les 'Neue Gedichte' vous semblent-ils encore tant impersonnels? Voyez-vous, pour pouvoir dire ce qui m'arrive, il m'a fallu non tant un instrument sentimental, mais de l'argile; sans le vouloir j'ai prétendu me servir de la poésie, dite lyrique, pour former, non des sentiments, mais *des choses que j'avais senties*; tout l'événement de la vie a dû trouver place dans cette formation, indépendamment de la souffrance ou du plaisir qu'il m'avait d'abord procuré. Cette formation eût été sans valeur si elle n'allait pas jusqu'à la *trans*-formation de tout détail passager, il fallait aboutir à l'essence.[14]

This passage is revealing because it clearly shows how Rilke treats his subjects in the *Neue Gedichte*; whether they be inanimate objects such as a fountain or a landscape, animals, such as a panther or flamingos, or human or human-like figures, they are all for him 'things' that he has felt - things of equal status, which radiate for him aspects of the essence of all being, which he moulds into 'Kunst-Dinge,' using words for sculptors' clay.

CONCLUSION

An examination of the mythological, biblical and human-figure poems of the Neue Gedichte has revealed that they are fundamentally related by the theme of the individual and his relationship with the self and the influences of the external world. Certain figures are locked within the confines of their own mind, either seeing the necessity of this if they are to achieve a state of sublime spiritual equanimity, or else regarding it as the most cruel form of isolation; some are completely overtaken spiritually by a powerful external force and as a result become inwardly broken, whilst others long to reach out and seek contact with the outside world in order to banish their inner emptiness. All these figures share the common quality of isolation.

An analysis of the imagery of these poems has shown that Rilke, in his striving to concretely 'build' and present in palpable form the often elusive occurrences and spiritual states of his subjects, uses images of great intensity and precision. The poems endeavour to present in concise form the quintessence of the associations which their subjects evoke. Whether the poems are specific studies of one individual figure, or the presentation of an epic event, the external features of the central figure are never visually described in their entirety but rather one feature, such as the hand or the eyes, or one gesture ('Gebärde'), or one action is focused upon and is interpreted as the outward manifestation of an inner occurrence or state. It is these inner occurrences or states of mind which are projected outwards in these poems, and for this reason the figures which they centre around do not become visibly perceptible, but are presented as intuitive mental pictures. There is a constant endeavour to give these inner sensations which would elude the grasp of the mind a fixed and tangible form; that which is fleeting is made static, that which is seemingly intangible is made emotionally palpable through imagery which strives at producing the most exact 'visible' equivalent for even the vaguest sensory experience. In this way, the imagery of these poems attempts to give permanence to the evanescence of manifold human emotions.

After completing the Neue Gedichte there followed in Rilke's development as a poet a long period of relative stagnation in his work, characterized by a continual searching for a new poetic form. In the works which preceded this collection, Rilke had used his poetry as a vehicle to express his own personal views of God, nature and death, and the relationship of human existence to these. Characteristic of Das Stundenbuch are its inward, metaphysical thoughts; its theme is an attempt to find that force called 'God' which controls all existence and which is the spiritual manifestation of the very soul of humanity. God is 'Das Ding der Dinge' - in his being are embodied all the unifying powers of the universe.

In the Neue Gedichte the personality of the artist becomes totally extinguished, and metaphysical speculation is completely absent. By plastically moulding the 'things' of the empirical world into poetry, Rilke allows them to radiate their meanings by themselves, without the intervention of the lyrical 'Ich.' It was the task of the sensitive reader to extract these meanings and to discover for himself the essential unity and truth which underlies the surface of the empirical world.

Rilke felt, however, that with the Neue Gedichte he had exhausted all the possibilities of the impersonal 'Machen der Dinge;' he came to the realization that art must mirror and contain human passion if it is to fulfil its purpose of revealing the truth of existence. In a letter to Marie von Thurn und Taxis in 1910, he states:

> Vielleicht lerne ich nur ein wenig menschlich werden, meine Kunst kam bisher nur um den Preis zustande, daß ich auf lauter Dingen bestand, das war Eigensinn und, ich fürchte, auch Hochmut, lieber Gott, und eine ungeheure Habgierigkeit muss es gewesen sein.[1]

The Duineser Elegien and Die Sonette an Orpheus, composed as the result of a final outburst of intense poetic inspiration contains the spirit of humanity which Rilke strove for so long to achieve. These works may be regarded as the ultimate synthesis of all that he had previously written, where all the warring elements of life, all its paradoxes and conflicts are reconciled and human existence is given a meaning and is celebrated with unquestioning praise. The images of the Neue Gedichte portray single facets of earthly existence with minute precision; in the later works, the imagery leads outwards in a final inspired attempt to embrace them all.

NOTES

Introduction

[1] Bernhard Blume, "Ding und Ich in Rilkes 'Neuen Gedichten'" *Modern Language Notes*, XLVII, 4, 222.

[2] Karl-Heinz Fingerhut, *Das Kreatürliche im Werke Rainer Maria Rilkes,* Bonn, 1970, p. 169.

[3] Hermann Pongs, *Das Bild in der Dichtung*, Vol. 2, Marburg, 1963, p. 466.

[4] Hans-Rudolf Müller, *Rainer Maria Rilke als Mystiker*, Berlin, 1935, p. 147.

[5] Brigitte Bradley, *R.M. Rilkes Neue Gedichte. Ihr zyklisches Gefüge*, Bern, 1967, p. 12.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Hans Berendt, *Rainer Maria Rilkes Neue Gedichte. Versuch einer Deutung*, Bonn, 1957.

[8] A scathing but very relevant attack is made against Berendt's book by F.D. Luke in his review contained in *German Life and Letters*, 12, 1958, 318.

[9] H.W. Belmore, *Rilke's Craftmanship. An Analysis of his Poetic Style*, Oxford, 1954.

[10] L. McGlashan, "Rilke's 'Neue Gedichte,'" *German Life and Letters*, XII, 1958/59, 81-101.

[11] Wolfgang Müller, *Rainer Maria Rilkes Neue Gedichte. Vielfältigkeit eines Gedichttypus*, Meisenheim am Glan, 1971.

[12] August Stahl, "*Vokabeln der Not*" *und* "*Früchte der Tröstung.*" *Studien zur Bildlichkeit im Werke Rainer Maria Rilkes.* Heidelberg, 1967.

[13] Ibid., p. 158.

[14] Paul Böckmann, "Der Strukturwandel der modernen Lyrik in Rilkes 'Neuen Gedichten,'" *Wirkendes Wort*, 12, 1962, 336-54.

Chapter I: The Theoretical Concepts of the *Neue Gedichte*

[1] R.M. Rilke "Von der Landschaft," in Rilke, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 5, Frankfurt, 1965, p. 521.

[2] R.M. Rilke, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 1, Zürich, 1955. Hereafter abbreviated to S.W. 1.

[3] R.M. Rilke, *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 5, p. 145.

[4] Ibid., p. 158.

[5] Ibid., p. 159.

[6] Ibid., p. 194-95.

[7] Ibid., p. 197-98.

[8] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe aus den Jahren 1902-1906*, Leipzig, 1929, p. 112.

[9] Ibid., p. 116.

[10] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe aus den Jahren 1906-1907*, Leipzig, 1930, p. 214.

[11] Katharina Kippenberg, *Rainer Maria Rilke. Ein Beitrag*, Leipzig, 1935, p. 202.

[12] Hermann Kunisch, *Rainer Maria Rilke und die Dinge*, Köln, 1946, p. 22.

[13] Paul Böckmann, "Der Strukturwandel der modernen Lyrik in Rilkes 'Neue Gedichte,'" *Wirkendes Wort*, 12, 1962, 338.

[14] Ibid., 340.

[15] I.A. Richards, *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, New York, 1925, p. 119.

Chapter II: Imagery from the World of Classical Antiquity

[1] Rilke, Sämtliche Werke, Vol. 5, p. 145.

[2] Ibid., p. 158.

[3] Ibid., p. 168-69.

[4] Ibid., p. 171.

[5] Rilke, Briefe 1902-1906, p. 123. Letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé, August 15th., 1903.

[6] Ibid., p. 46. Letter to Clara Rilke, September 27th., 1902.

[7] Loc. cit.

[8] Loc. cit.

[9] Ibid., p. 123. Letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé.

[10] Ibid., p. 124.

[11] Ibid., p. 125.

[12] Rilke, Sämtliche Werke, Vol. 5, p. 175-76.

[13] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 481.

[14] Ibid., p. 557.

[15] Many of the objects of Rilke's 'Dinggedichte' may be seen in Rilkes Leben und Werk im Bild, edited by Ingeborg Schnack, Wiesbaden, 1956. The Archaischer Torso Apollos is plate no. 173.

[16] Werner Kohlschmidt, Rilke Interpretationen, Lahr, 1948, p. 42.

[17] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 483.

[18] Ibid., p. 483.

[19] Ibid., p. 483-84.

[20] Rilke, Briefe, 1906-1907, p. 298ff.

[21] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 557.

[22] Ibid., p. 542-45.

[23] C.M. Bowra, The Heritage of Symbolism, London, 1962, p. 69.

[24] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 546-49.

[25] Ibid., p. 549-52.

[26] Hans Schwerte, in his article "Rilkes Geburt der Venus," Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift, XXXII, 1950-51, 155-59, shows that the connexion of Venus, (Aphrodite), and the dolphin was not unknown in Hellenistic times. The dolphin was the 'Uterus-Tier,' but this image was not a common one.

[27] Ibid., p. 159.

[28] C.f. the first Duino Elegy: 'Das Schöne ist nichts als des Schrecklichen Anfang, den wir noch gerade ertragen.'

[29] Rilke, Sämtliche Werke, Vol. 5, p. 152.

Chapter III: Biblical Imagery

[1] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 562.

[2] Cited by Marianne Sievers, Die biblischen Motive in der Dichtung Rainer Maria Rilkes, Berlin, 1938, p. 10-11.

[3] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 490. The biblical reference is Joshua Chapter 10, 12, and 24. Hereafter, biblical references will appear in parenthesis after the references to the poems concerned.

[4] Ibid., p. 566.

[5] Ibid., p. 567.

[6] Ibid., p. 563, (Kings, Chapter 1)

[7] Ibid., p. 564, (Saul's prophecies are contained in Samuel I, Chapter 19, v. 10-12, and 19),

[8] Ibid., p. 565, (Samuel, Chapter 28).

[9] Ibid., p. 488, (Samuel I, Chapter 16, v. 23).

[10] Ibid., p. 486, (Kings I, Chapter 1, v. 1-4).

[11] Wolfgang Müller, Rainer Maria Rilkes "Neue Gedichte" Vielfältigkeit eines Gedichttypus, Meisenheim am Glan, 1971, p. 68.

[12] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 562.

[13] Ibid., p. 570.

[14] Ibid., p. 569.

[15] Sievers, Die biblischen Motive, p. 63.

[16] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 492.

[17] Priscilla Washburn Shaw, Rilke, Valéry and Yeats. The Domain of Self, New Jersey, 1964, p. 54.

[18] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 581.

[19] Ibid., p. 591.

[20] Ibid., p. 494.

[21] Ibid., p. 582.

[22] Rilke, Briefe, 1907-1914, p. 229.

Chapter IV: The Imagery of the Human-Figure Poems

[1] "Die Erwachsene," "Eine Welke," "Die Greisin."

[2] "Die Genesende," "Die Erblindende."

[3] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 591.

[4] Ibid., p. 513.

[5] Ibid., p. 625.

[6] Ibid., p. 514.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., p. 516.

[9] Ibid., p. 590.

[10] Ibid., p. 623.

[11] Ibid., p. 619.

[12] Ibid., p. 624.

[13] Ibid., p. 513.

[14] Wolfgang Müller also notes the same technique, i.e. the superimposition of a consistently explored metaphor over a concrete situation in order to extract every nuance of that situation, in the poems "Die Marien-Prozession," "Römische Compagna," and "Spanische Tänzerin," Müller, *Rilkes Neue Gedichte*, p. 130.

[15] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 504.

[16] Brigitte Bradley, *R.M. Rilkes Neue Gedichte*, Bern, 1967, p. 71-72.

[17] Cf. "Der Auszug des verlorenen Sohnes," "Die Irren," "Eine von den Alten."

[18] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 626.

[19] Cf. Rilke's letter to Lou Andreas Salomé (21.10.13.) "Ich erschrecke, wenn ich denke, wie ich aus mir hinauslebte, wie immer am Fernrohr stehend, jeder Kommenden (i.e. Sehnsucht) eine Seligkeit zuschreibend, die sicher bei keiner zu finden war: meine Seligkeit, die Seligkeit, einst, meiner einsamsten Stunden. Ich muss soviel an das Gedicht aus den neuen Gedichten denken, das, ich glaube, "der Fremde"

heisst, - wie wusst ich, worauf es ankommt: "alles dieses immer unbegehrend hinzulassen" und ich, der nur noch begehrte -. Wiederanfangen." Quoted by Hans Berendt, Rainer Maria Rilkes Neue Gedichte. Versuch einer Deutung, Bonn, 1956, p. 265.

[20] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 636.

[21] Cf. the interpretations of Norbert Fuerst in Phases of Rilke, Bloomington, 1958, p. 77f., and Hans Berendt in R.M. Rilkes neue Gedichte, p. 33f.

[22] H.F. Peters, Rainer Maria Rilke, The Masks and the Man, Seattle, 1960, p. 110.

[23] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 532.

[24] Ibid., p. 508.

[25] Ibid., p. 586-87.

[26] Ibid., p. 862.

[27] Quoted by Erich Heller in Thomas Mann. The Ironic German, 1958, p. 82.

[28] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 511.

[29] Ibid., p. 587.

[30] Ibid., p. 588.

[31] Wolfgang Müller, Rilkes Neue Gedichte, p. 44-45.

[32] Rilke, S.W. 1, p. 576-77.

[33] Ibid., p. 514.

[34] See also "Mädchenklage," "Der Auszug des verlorenen Sohnes," "Sankt Sebastian," "Der Stifter," "Der Schwan," "Kindheit," "Vor dem Sommerregen," "Selbstbildnis aus dem Jahre 1906," "Die Insel," "Orpheus. Euridike. Hermes," amongst many others.

Chapter V: The Nature and Function of the Imagery in the Mythological, Biblical and Human-Figure Poems

[1] C. Day Lewis, The Poetic Image, London, 1968, p. 17.

[2] Rilke also uses the figure of Buddha in the Neue Gedichte to exemplify the state of perfect equanimity of being, (c.f. the two poems entitled "Buddha" and "Buddha in der Glorie," in Rilke S. W. 1, pp. 496, 526 and 624 respectively).

[3] To this category could also be added the figures in the poems "Die Irren," "Eine von den Alten" and "Der Blinde."

[4] Rilke, Sämtliche Werke, Vol. 5, p. 158-59; also quoted, in part, in Chapter 1, p.14 of this study.

[5] L. McGlashan, "Rilke's Neue Gedichte," German Life and Letters, XII, 1958-59, 85.

[6] Cf. H.W. Belmore, "The reader of Neue Gedichte gathers the impression that, with the exception of a dozen or so longer poems and a few quite short ones, most of the pieces of this collection are sonnets. Yet of the 191 poems that form the two parts, only fifty are genuine sonnets; a great number are tripartite poems of twelve lines, and many of the remainder are near sonnets, that is to say they contain thirteen or fifteen lines, and resemble Rilke's real sonnets so much in length of line, metre and general structure that they do not stand out as markedly different forms. We might say that the sonnet, although not actually in the majority marks the key tonality in these collections." Rilke's Craftsmanship. An Analysis of his poetic Style, Oxford, 1954, p. 11.

[7] Ibid., p. 12.

[8] C. Day Lewis, The Poetic Image, p. 88.

[9] McGlashan, "Rilke's Neue Gedichte," p. 93.

[10] Wolfgang Müller, Rilkes 'Neue Gedichte,' p. 94.

[11] Rilke, Briefe 1904-1907, p. 163, quoted by Müller, op. cit., p. 94. The 'Bildnis' to which Rilke is referring here is 'La Cucana' by Goya.

[12] Further examples of this type among the poems examined in this study, whereby abstract emotions are presented in analogy to concrete things are to be seen in "Eranna an Sappho," "Alkestis," "Tröstung des Elia," "Der Blinde," "Ein Frauenschicksal."

[13] Werner Günther, Weltinnenraum. Die Dichtung Rainer Maria Rilkes, Berlin, 1952, p. 219.

[14] Rilke, Briefe 1914-1926, p. 389-90, quoted by H.W. Belmore, op.cit., p. 193.

Conclusion

[1] Rilke, *Briefe 1907-1914*, p. 110-11.

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_______. *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter*. Insel Bücherei, 1951.

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